

# *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*



Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society  
(Second revised edition with links to inscriptions)

Philip A. Harland

**ASSOCIATIONS, SYNAGOGUES, AND CONGREGATIONS:**  
**CLAIMING A PLACE IN ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN SOCIETY**

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By Philip A. Harland

Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations:  
Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society.  
(Second revised edition with links to inscriptions)

<<http://www.philipharland.com/associations/>>

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Cover image by Philip A. Harland: Marble relief of a maenad and two satyrs in a Dionysiac procession (ca. 100 CE, following Attic prototypes of the fourth century BCE). From the Villa Quintiliana on the Via Appia, south of Rome, now in the Townley collection at the British Museum (inv. GR 1805.7-3.128).

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

This is a new, fully revised edition of a book that was originally released by Fortress Press in 2003, which was itself a revision of my doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto's Centre for the Study of Religion (completed in 1999). If you have not already done so, please visit the book's website to pay an amount that you feel is appropriate for your use of this book:

<http://philipharland.com/associations/?p=42>.

There are two main advantages to this new 2013 edition over its previous incarnations. First of all, I engage with more recent scholarship (from the past 10 years) on important points, particularly in parts one and two on the associations. In some cases, I have shortened the discussion here if I have more fully developed the ideas in my subsequent work on *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians* (New York: Continuum, 2009).

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, I provide hyperlinks to inscriptions that are discussed in the text and that are now gathered together on the companion website to *Associations in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012) = *AGRW*:

<http://philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/>. Users can simply click on an inscription in the pdf and be brought to information about the inscription, including a description, the original texts (Greek or Latin), and, often, an English translation. I also continue to maintain an easy-to-read companion website for the present book accessible at the following address:

<http://philipharland.com/associations/?p=43>. These arrangements may also assist instructors who wish to make use of both the sourcebook and this book (or parts of it) within courses on social or religious life in the ancient Mediterranean,

My wife, Cheryl Williams, and my two sons, Justin and Nathaniel, have been an ongoing support throughout my work. I would like to thank the following people who have generously taken the time to offer suggestions and criticisms at various stages: John S. Kloppenborg, Roger Beck, Peter Richardson, Keir Hammer, Richard Ascough, Philip Sellew, Dave Graham, Harold Remus, Leif E. Vaage, and K.C. Hanson, as well as members of both the Canadian Society of Biblical Literature and the Society of Biblical Literature. Andreas Bendlin's comments on chapter 6 for preparation of this new edition have been very helpful in clarifying our agreements and disagreements. Colleagues at both Concordia University and York University have supported my work in various ways. Grants from York University have aided my research, including the construction and management of the websites. I would like to thank Fortress Press for transferring the copyright to me for this second edition.

## ILLUSTRATIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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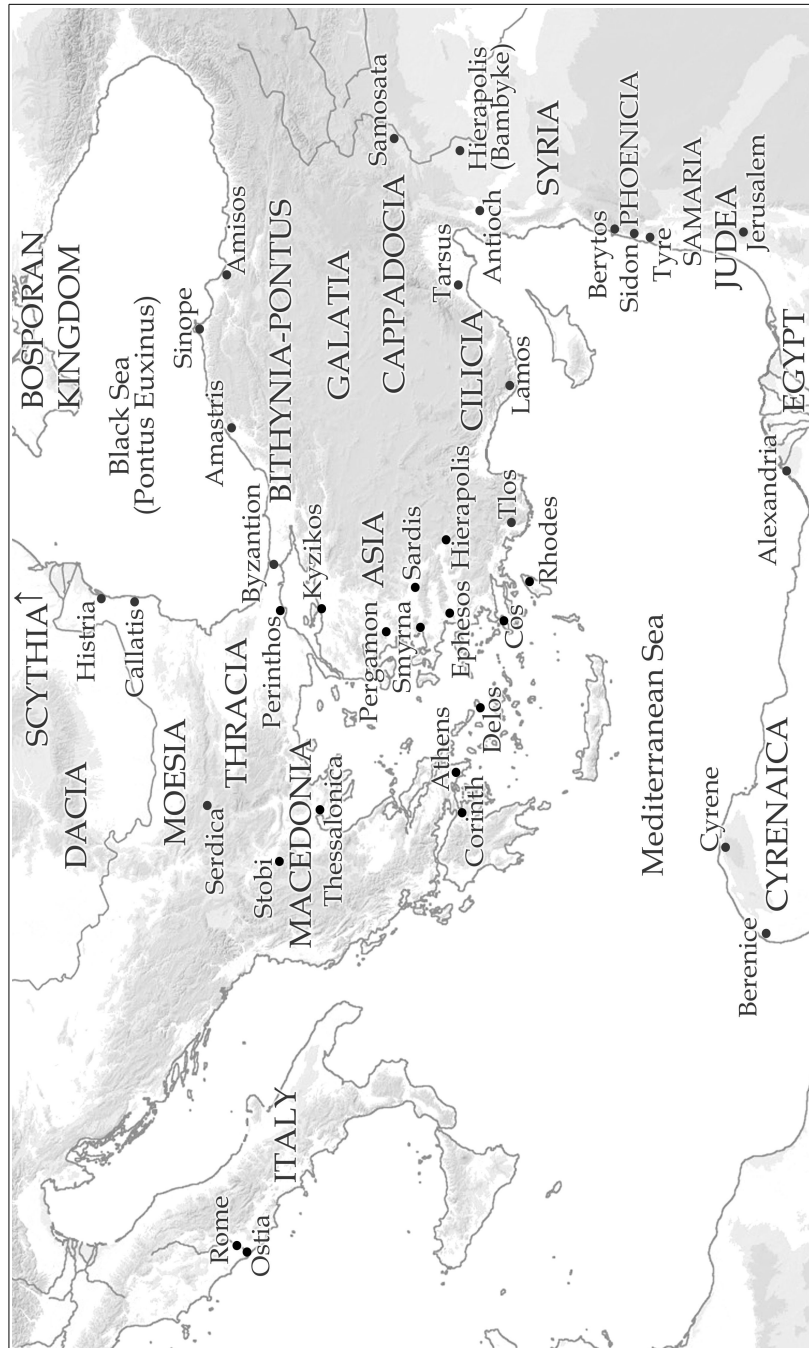
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## Italy and the Eastern Roman Empire.

Map base courtesy of Ancient World Mapping Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
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## INTRODUCTION

### Western Asia Minor as a Hub of Early Christianity

Western Asia Minor was a hub of early Christian social and literary activity. Paul himself spent considerable time in the region (especially at Ephesos), perhaps several years, and a circle of his followers actively wrote from there to “congregations” or “assemblies” (*ekklēsiai*) in the same vicinity, producing the writings we know as the Pastoral epistles (1–2 Timothy, Titus), Ephesians, and Colossians. Stories of Paul’s adventures in this part of the Mediterranean were told and re-told well after his death, as the Acts of the Apostles and the apocryphal *Acts of Paul* show. Writings attributed to Peter likewise find their home here, in the form of 1 Peter, a “diaspora” (dispersion) letter written to Jesus-followers in Asia, Bithynia, and other provinces of Asia Minor. John, the Judean prophet of the Apocalypse, communicated his visions regarding the destinies of God’s people and Satan’s people to congregations in seven cities of Asia, Ephesos among them. There are also strong traditions that place the Johannine communities—as represented in the Gospel of John and the epistles (1–3 John)—in western Asia Minor.



Figure 1: Harbor street at Ephesos.

The importance of this region for early Christianity is not limited to the New Testament. It was precisely to Christian assemblies living in the area that Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, wrote his letters in the early second century. The renowned bishop Polycarp lived his long life in Smyrna before it ended in martyrdom in his eighties (about 160 CE or Common Era = AD). So it is worthwhile investigating social and cultural life in western Asia Minor, including cities like Ephesos, since this is the world in which many followers of Jesus lived and breathed, and in which many early Christian documents were produced and read. Yet this is certainly not the only reason why research in this area is so valuable.

Asia Minor was a lively centre of activity for another closely related set of communities in the first centuries. The Jesus movement began within Judean culture (or, Judaism) and networks of Judeans dispersed throughout the Roman empire, including Asia Minor, continued to be important for this new-born movement as it made its way into the Greco-Roman world. Much of our evidence for Judeans settled outside of the homeland pertains to Asia Minor (perhaps second only to Alexandria in Egypt and the city of Rome itself). Evidence for these “gatherings” or “synagogues” (*synagōgai*) comes partly from Josephus, who refers to civic and imperial decrees concerning Judeans at Ephesos, Sardis, Pergamon, and elsewhere (in the late first century BCE). Our knowledge is also greatly enriched by archaeological discoveries dating to the first centuries of the common era. Beyond the substantial remains associated with the synagogue in the bath-gymnasium complex at Sardis (dating to the third century or later), there are also numerous monuments and plaques with inscriptions that give us glimpses into the lives of Judeans at numerous locales, including Ephesos, Smyrna, Hierapolis, and Akmoneia.

From a bird’s eye view of culture in the Roman empire, Judean synagogues and Christian assemblies stand together as *cultural minority groups*, primarily due to their shared devotion to only one God (“monotheism”) in a culture where the acceptance of many gods (“polytheism”) was standard. Yet a closer look at the diversity of these groups in light of other local associations may draw attention to the complexities involved in understanding the *place* of synagogues and assemblies *within* Greco-Roman society.

Christian congregations and Judean synagogues were, by no means, alone as unofficial gatherings within this cultural landscape. Their Greek and Roman neighbors likewise joined together in informal groups, guilds, or “associations” (*koina*, *synodoi*, *thiasoi*, *mystai*, *phratores*, *synergasiai*, *collegia*) under the patronage of deities like Zeus, Dionysos, and Demeter. Associations gathered together regularly to socialize, share communal meals, and honor both their earthly and their divine benefactors. In fact, cities like Ephesos were dotted with such groups, groups which may open a new window into the world of early Christians and diaspora Judeans.

In many ways, these associations provide us with close *social analogies* for both assemblies and synagogues. Moreover, although for the sake of clarity in discussion I often use the terms “assemblies” or “congregations” for Jesus-followers, “synagogues” for Judeans, and “associations” for others, we shall see that synagogues and assemblies share many important features with these others *associations*. Some associations in the ancient Mediterranean world expressed their identities in similar terms, using “synagogue” and “assembly” for a meeting or for the group itself, for instance.

As I discuss at some length in *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians* (Harland 2009, 36–60), ancient observers, Judeans, and Christians alike recognized this parallelism, sometimes describing synagogues and assemblies in terms drawn from the world of associations.<sup>1</sup> Investigating the evidence for associations *on its own terms* and then proceeding to the task of comparison will advance our understanding of the place of Judeans and Jesus-followers within the realities of social life in the ancient Mediterranean.

A journey into cities like Ephesos, therefore, brings us into direct contact with the real world where congregations and synagogues (and their individual members) lived and developed. Paying close attention to archaeological evidence or artifacts from cities of Asia Minor may bring this world to life and provide a new angle of vision on Judeans and Jesus-followers, as well as their Greek and Roman neighbors.



Figure 2: Monument from the fishery toll-office at Ephesos, now in the museum at Selçuk / Ephesos.

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Pliny the Younger, *Epistles* 10.97.7–8 (= AGRW L40); Lucian of Samosata, *The Passing of Peregrinus* 11 (= L17); Celsus in Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.1; 3.23; 8.17 (= L19); Ignatius of Antioch, *Eph.* 12.2; 19.1; Tertullian, *Apology* 38–39 (= L18); Eusebius, *H.E.* 10.1.8 (= L21); Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.215–16, 235 (= L33); Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 312, 316 (= L37) and *On Virtues* 33.178.

## A Visit to Roman Ephesos

Traveling through a city in Roman times, one would encounter an array of monuments, statues, and buildings indicative of the populace's social and cultural life. An imagined visit to Ephesos in the second century with an eye for small group life will draw attention to neglected issues concerning group-society relations and imperialism that will occupy us throughout this study. Docking at the harbor of Ephesos (see photo in figure 1), one cannot help but notice the nearby fishery toll-office, where an impressive monument of blue marble lists the donations by members of an association of fishermen and fish-dealers, along with their families (*IEph 20* = *AGRW* 162; see figure 2). Among those honored by the construction of this building are the emperor Nero and members of his family, as well as both the Romans and the Ephesians. One family also paid to have two altars dedicated within a special room devoted to the "great gods" of Samothrace, gods who are known for protecting devotees against the hazards of seafaring. Looking closer, one discovers another deity watching over and protecting those who engage in business here, the Egyptian goddess Isis. The statue of Isis was donated to "the workers" in the toll-office by a wealthy woman, who dedicated it to Ephesos' patron deity, Artemis, and to the emperor Antoninus Pius (*IEph 1503* = *AGRW* 169).

Walking along harbor street towards the theater, we happen upon two stalls near the market where silversmiths sell their products, including statues of the goddess Artemis (*IEph 547*). The author of the Acts of the Apostles (19:23-41) relates a story when the silversmiths and other craftsmen at Ephesos gathered in the theatre (figure 1) in defense of the city's patron deity, Artemis Ephesia (see figure 3). The prominence of the silversmiths' guild at Ephesos becomes clearer as we encounter several other inscriptions during our visit, including those on graves and honorary monuments (→ [silversmiths](#)). Among them is a statue for T. Claudius Aristion, an important official of the city who was also high-priest in charge of sacrifices for the emperors at the provincial imperial cult of Asia (*IEph 425 + 636*). This statue was set up during the principate of Domitian (81-96 CE), when an imposing provincial temple was built in the upper section of Ephesos for the "revered ones" (*Sebastoi* in Greek = *Augusti* in Latin), the emperors and members of the imperial family. These revered imperial gods were likewise important to another association at Ephesos: the devotees of the goddess Demeter, who publicize a letter from the Roman proconsul acknowledging their "mysteries and sacrifices" not only for Demeter, but also for the Augusti (*IEph 213*).

Unless we happened to be acquainted with local, inconspicuous groups devoted to Christ and the Judean God, we would not know that (also in the late-first century) two leaders had written to congregations living in Ephesos and other parts of Asia Minor. One Jesus-follower exhorted them to "*honor the emperor*" (1 Peter 2:17) and the other warned them against the dangers of "*worshiping the beast*" (Revelation ch. 13). We may be able to learn something important about the place of congregations within Greco-Roman society if we pay special attention to these contrasting approaches among Jesus-followers, positioning these approaches in relation to concrete practices encountered within other associations and synagogues.





*Figure 3: Statue of Artemis of Ephesos, now in the Naples Archaeological Museum.*



## Scholarly Context

This brief visit to Ephesos provides us with glimpses into the cultural world in which Judean synagogues and Christian assemblies lived and developed alongside many other associations. This visit raises subjects that will occupy us throughout this study, which is concerned with assessing and comparing the place of diverse associations, synagogues, and assemblies within the framework of the Greek city (*polis*) under Roman rule in Asia Minor (ca. 27 BCE–161 CE). In particular, what role did imperial cults, honors, and connections play in the external relations and internal life of these groups? My central argument is that associations in Roman Asia Minor, including *some* synagogues and assemblies, could participate in certain aspects of civic life under Roman rule, including involvements in imperial honors and connections. Most associations were not, as often assumed, subversive groups in consistent tension with the structures of the city and empire. Rather, despite occasional involvements in civic disturbances, there was ongoing positive interaction between these groups and society. This study aims to move the discussion forward by making extensive use of inscriptions and artifacts that allow us to compare actual associations with synagogues and assemblies rather than merely theorizing in a vacuum about the relationship between such groups and various dimensions of society around them.

The approach of scholars who categorize both Judean gatherings and Christian assemblies as “sects” in conflict with society hinders a proper understanding of the *spectrum of possibilities* in interactions between specific groups and certain aspects of the society in which they lived. There was a range of perspectives and practices among Judeans and Christians with regard to separation from, or involvement in, particular aspects of society, including imperial honors and connections. Virtually all Judeans and Christians, it seems, rejected active participation in honoring the emperors as gods in rituals and sacrifices. However, there were involvements in other aspects of civic life, including other imperial honors or connections that did not necessarily acknowledge the emperors as gods.

The author of the Apocalypse, on the one hand, clearly condemned any form of honoring the emperor (the beast in league with Satan in his view), and he also took a sectarian stance in speaking against other social, economic, and cultic contacts with imperial aspects of civic life. On the other hand, opponents of John such as the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:14–16, 20–25) participated more readily in some areas of social and cultural life within the city, including communal meals with fellow inhabitants and some imperial-related practices.

Many other Judeans and Jesus-followers likewise took a more moderate position with regard to participation in imperial honors and connections that did not necessarily entail viewing imperial figures as deities. Epigraphic evidence reveals that some synagogues did maintain connections with and honor imperial functionaries and emperors. In contrast to the Apocalypse, the authors of 1 Peter and the Pastoral epistles encouraged followers of Jesus in Asia Minor to honor or pray for the emperor. Attention to these and other imperial dimensions of group-life among associations, synagogues, and assemblies tells us something important about how these groups claimed a place within society under Roman rule.

This study seeks to fill a significant gap in research by resolving problems that present

themselves at the intersection of several areas of scholarship on social and cultural life in the Greco-Roman world. There are three main areas of study to consider here. First, associations have drawn some attention from scholars since the height of their study around the turn of the twentieth century, which witnessed the production of the foundational studies of Paul Foucart (1873), Wilhelm Liebenam (1890), Erich Ziebarth (1896), Jean-Pierre Waltzing (1895–1900), Franz Poland (1909), and Mariano San Nicolo (1912–13). Until recent years, however, most studies by scholars of ancient history have focused on the legal situation and organizational characteristics of associations. Few have approached these groups with sociohistorical questions concerning group-society relations in mind, and there is a lack of local or regional studies.<sup>2</sup> Although associations have drawn the attention of scholars of early Christianity (especially since the 1970s), only recently have some begun to study associations on their own terms or attempted comparative, sociohistorical studies and there has rarely been a focus on group-society relations and imperial aspects of society.

When it comes to questions of how such groups related to society and culture in city and empire, there are widespread *assumptions* within scholarship which presuppose antagonistic relations. Many scholars say far less, if anything, of what we encountered in our walk through Ephesos—the involvement of groups in imperial honors and connections of various types—than they do of the occasions when associations became involved in disturbances that sometimes brought controlling actions by authorities. Most common are notions that associations were subversive and that their relationship with civic or imperial society were predominantly negative. G.E.M. de Ste. Croix (1981, 273, 318–20), for instance, includes associations among the lower-class means of social protest, discussing them only in terms of their involvement in civic unrest and stressing the authorities’ suspicion and control of them. He says nothing of evidence concerning the participation of these same groups within society, including positive interactions with Roman officials. De Ste. Croix is by no means alone in focusing on incidents such as civic disturbances and imperial control to the neglect of other dimensions of group-society relations.

Second, some ancient historians tend to neglect or downplay the significance of the emperors in the cultural life of the populace, especially when it comes to assessing imperial cults, namely rituals that involved the apparent recognition of the emperors as gods. M. P. Nilsson (1961, 384–94) and G. W. Bowersock (1965, 112–21), for instance, characterize imperial cults as solely political phenomena, lacking genuine importance for the populace in areas like Asia Minor. The present study is indebted to Simon Price’s foundational work, *Rituals and Power* (1984), which marks a turning point in the study of imperial cults in Asia Minor. Price and others, such as Steven Friesen (1993, 2001) and Stephen Mitchell (1993, 1100–117), are challenging previous assumptions and

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2 Theodor Mommsen (1843) focused on legislative matters, and several other scholars followed this path (Conrat 1969 [1873]; Radin 1910; Carolsfeld 1969 [1933]; Duff 1938). Foucart (1873) focused on internal organization, and others have pursued this (cf. Liebenam 1890; Waltzing 1895–1900; Ziebarth 1896; Kornemann 1901; Oehler 1893; Oehler 1905; Poland 1909; San Nicolò 1912–13; Calhoun 1913). The period from the 1920s to the 1960s was relatively subdued, though several articles and studies touched on associations (cf. Tod 1932; Roberts 1936; Ferguson and Nock 1944; Nilsson 1957). The renewed interest in social history since the 1960s has been accompanied by attention to associations among scholars of ancient history. See, for instance, MacMullen 1966, 1974b; Schulz-Falkenthal 1965, 1966, 1971, 1973; Cenival 1972; Ausbüttel 1982; Cazanove 1986; Fellmeth 1987, 1990; Royden 1988; Fisher 1988a, 1988b; Brashear 1993; Nijf 1997; Jones 1995, 1999; Dittmann-Schöne 2000; Arnaoutoglou 2003; Aneziri 2003; Sommer 2006.

beginning to assess the significance of the emperors within intertwined social, political, and cultural dimensions of life. Still, these scholars have not yet investigated associations in this regard.

The evidence for associations provides a new vantage point on the significance of rituals and other honors for the emperors at the local level. Participation or non-participation in such activities will tell us something about where to locate groups on a cultural map of the Roman empire. It will also serve to correct the picture of associations as primarily subversive or anti-Roman groups.

One reason for the unbalanced scholarly picture of associations within ancient society relates to a scholarly focus on literary and legal sources to the neglect of archaeological and epigraphic evidence (i.e. material remains, buildings, monuments and inscriptions). A more balanced picture of associative life emerges when we give attention to the inscriptions, which attest to ongoing engagements by many groups in imperial connections and honors within the cities.

This brings us to a third contribution of the present study. Scholars interested in Judean and Christian groups or literature of Asia Minor have touched on social questions regarding the relationship between these groups and surrounding society. However, there is a tendency to stress conflicts, tensions, and separation to the neglect of other aspects of group-society relations (much like the conflict-centred approach of those who have studied other associations).

Recent studies of synagogues in Asia Minor show that Judean groups were not isolated and introverted communities living in a hostile environment. Instead, the relationships between such cultural minority groups and their civic environments varied and was quite complicated. A.T. Kraabel (1968) and Paul R. Trebilco (1991), for example, draw attention to neglected evidence which suggests some degree of interaction between diaspora Judeans and their Greek neighbors. These scholars point towards areas of participation in civic life on the part of some synagogues. They argue that some degree of integration within society did not necessarily amount to the dissolution of the group or the loss of Judean distinctiveness, and I would suggest that similar insights should at least inform our approach to Christian assemblies. Scholars are increasingly recognizing that some, perhaps many, synagogues could find the city to be a home in important respects. Yet few scholars focus on the evidence for Judean groups' involvements in imperial aspects of civic life specifically, including imperial honors and connections. These involvements may tell us more about the place of these groups within society.

Unfortunately, this revised picture of diaspora Judean groups within the city is not always taken as a cue for reassessing Christian assemblies' places within Greco-Roman society. Recent years have seen a growing interest in the social world of Christian literature pertinent to Asia Minor, including 1 Peter, John's Apocalypse, the Pastoral epistles, Colossians, Ephesians, and Ignatius' epistles.<sup>3</sup> Yet those who consider the issue of group-society relations are often preoccupied with the characterization of congregations as "sectarian" in a sociological sense, and many scholars stress Jesus followers' separation from, or lack of participation in, most areas of civic life. The result has been a concentration on the ways in which such assemblies were in tension with surrounding

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3 On social aspects of 1 Peter, see Schröger 1981; Balch 1981, 1986; Elliott 1990 [1981], Elliott 1986a; Downing 1988; Feldmeier 1992; Winter 1994. On the Apocalypse, see Aune 1981; Collins 1984; Schüssler Fiorenza 1985; Hemer 1986; Thompson 1990; Bauckham 1993; Scobie 1993; Slater 1998; Royalty 1998. On the Pastorals see MacDonald 1988; Kidd 1990. On Colossians and Ephesians, see Arnold 1992 [1989], 1996 [1995]; Broekhoven 1997. On Ignatius, see Malina 1978; Schoedel 1980; Maier 1991.

society to the neglect of evidence regarding how these assemblies continued to live *within* the city and empire.

John H. Elliott's (1990 [1981]) approach to the social situation and strategy of 1 Peter is in some respects representative of this sectarian-focused position. Employing a sociological model developed by Bryan R. Wilson, Elliott categorizes Christian groups in the provinces of Asia Minor as "sects," suggesting further that 1 Peter's strategy is to further heighten the sectarian stance of these groups. Harry O. Maier (1991, 163-68) takes a similar approach to assemblies addressed by Ignatius, emphasizing the "sectarian identity of the Asian churches." For Elliott, the most important characteristics of these sects are their tensions with and separation from society. The typical Christian assembly in Asia Minor, he stresses, was an exclusive "community set apart from the routine affairs of civic and social life" (Elliott 1990 [1981], 79). In this respect, Elliott's characterization of Christian assemblies stands in continuity with the traditional, conflict-oriented portrait of group-society interaction among synagogues.

Despite the contributions scholars such as Elliott make, there are difficulties with this sort of approach. Elliott correctly emphasizes the distinctive identity of Jesus-followers: they distinguished themselves from surrounding society in many respects and refrained from participation in certain areas of life within the city, especially ritual life associated with honoring Greek or Roman gods and goddesses. There were also clear tensions between some assemblies and society. However, the way in which Elliott applies the sectarian model leads him to oversimplify the complexities of group-society relations and to neglect other evidence which does not so readily fit the sectarian model. Although 1 Peter advocates separation from certain aspects of society and culture, there are other values, conventions and practices of civic life which that author apparently does accept or, even, promote. Challenging Elliott's approach, David L. Balch's works (1981, 1986) draw attention to some degree of acculturation evident within 1 Peter. This includes the use and adaptation of commonly accepted "Greco-Roman" values concerning relationships within the household between master and slave, and husband and wife (1 Peter 2:18-3:7).

Furthermore, there is 1 Peter's advocacy of respecting and honoring the emperor and others in authority (1 Peter 2:11-17). This is a potential area of participation in civic life that Elliott does not adequately address due to his focus on sectarianism. Looking at this advice to Jesus-followers in Asia Minor in light of the practices of other associations and synagogues in the same region may reveal a more complicated picture of Christian assemblies. The usual sectarian-focused approach simply does not do justice to all the evidence.

There are similar difficulties with some scholarly attempts to explain the social context of John's Apocalypse. This is a first-century document which is clearly concerned with the relationship between followers of Jesus and society and the author has particular opinions about imperial cults and connections specifically (esp. Rev 13, 17-18). The traditional approach to the Apocalypse views the hostile and sectarian perspective of the author as *representative* of actual viewpoints and relations of most Jesus-followers. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1985), for instance, views the futuristic visions involving enforced worship of the beast and martyrdoms as a reflection of actual conditions faced by Christians in western Asia Minor during the time of Domitian (81-96 CE). She argues that the Apocalypse's invective against Rome and the emperors is a "fitting

response” to this sociopolitical situation. From this viewpoint, the majority of the recipients of this writing would have identified with John’s sectarian perspective. Most Christians, it is suggested, would therefore have removed themselves from participation in imperial honors and connections within civic life. This understanding of the Apocalypse also finds expression in common assumptions within scholarship concerning a fundamental antagonism between early Christ-devotees and the Roman empire generally. Often this is expressed in terms of a conflict between the “cult of Christ” (*Christkult*) and the “cult of Caesar” (*Kaiserkult*), as Adolf Deissmann put it.<sup>4</sup>

This oversimplified approach to the Apocalypse and to early Christianity generally is highly problematic. Recent studies by scholars such as Adela Yarbro Collins (1984) and Leonard L. Thompson (1990) suggest a more complex relation between rhetoric and reality with regard to the Apocalypse. The futuristic visions of John the seer do not directly represent the actual conditions in Roman Asia in the time of Domitian. There is a lack of evidence for any extensive, imperial-initiated persecution during this period. Nor is there evidence that Domitian’s principate witnessed an increase or fundamental change in the promotion or significance of imperial cults in Asia Minor.

We need to reassess the relationship between John’s Apocalypse, life within the congregations, and sociocultural realities within the cities. This is especially true when it comes to issues concerning imperial cults. We can no longer simply assume that the sectarian stance and hostile perspectives of the Apocalypse represent actual relations between most congregations and various dimensions of surrounding culture. Instead, we need to consider a range of evidence concerning the actual imperial-related practices of Jesus-followers, viewing this in light of the activities of both synagogues and other associations in the same region. Moreover, there was a range of possibilities among both Christian assemblies and Judean synagogues with regard to interaction with, participation in, or separation from specific social and cultural aspects of life within the city and empire.

Overall, then, the problem is that many scholars do not pay adequate attention to the concrete and complex ways in which local associations, synagogues, and assemblies found a place for themselves in city and empire. Few have tapped into the vast reservoir of archaeological evidence concerning associative life. None have attempted to compare the practices of associations with those of synagogues and assemblies in this regard. A variety of resources and methods will assist us in rectifying these unbalanced scholarly portraits.

## Methods and Sources

This study finds its home where the disciplines of Christian Origins, Jewish Studies, Ancient History, Epigraphy, Archaeology, and Religious Studies meet, and its methods and sources reflect this interdisciplinary character. The overall approach of this study is sociohistorical, which means several things. First, I am interested in the actual social and cultural life of persons and groups (from different levels of society) living within a particular region of the Roman empire. Social historians approach their subject with an attentiveness to the fact that all within society, not just the rich and

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4 Deissmann 1995 [1908]. Cf. Richard A. Horsley 1997.

powerful, are worthy of attention and could be significant actors and players within history. Material remains and inscriptional evidence provide an important window into social history. Second, I am concerned with social relations and, more specifically, with issues regarding the relationship between groups and surrounding sociocultural institutions and values. This encompasses a variety of issues concerning interactions between groups (associations, synagogues or assemblies) and others within the structures of society, including the elites. It also encompasses the relation of groups to social and cultural structures, values, symbols, practices, and institutions within society.

Another sociohistorical dimension of this study is its use of methods and insights from the social sciences, which can provide new perspectives on society and culture in the ancient Mediterranean. Sociological studies of social networks, for instance, will shed light on both the formation of associations and on the significance of connections between groups and individuals within society. Anthropological insights will help to clarify the meaning of rituals for the emperors within associations. Social scientific studies of acculturation and assimilation among cultural minorities will clarify the complicated nature of group-society interactions in the case of synagogues and assemblies. Yet I will also need to address difficulties in how some scholars of early Christianity employ sociological models of sectarianism, for instance.

It is important to make some preliminary observations about the use of these social scientific methods here.<sup>5</sup> I employ insights from the social sciences in a *heuristic* manner. By this I mean that they aid in the formation of questions that help us discover what might otherwise remain unnoticed. These methods provide an alternative lens through which to observe ancient society and culture, furthering our understanding of phenomena within it. But these methods certainly do not serve as substitutes for evidence.

Furthermore, we need to remain attentive to the fact that many social scientific methods or models are developed within modern societies, and that our use of them needs to be cross-culturally sensitive and flexible. This requires that we modify or shape them in ways that avoid anachronistic approaches to studying ancient societies. Furthermore, evidence for social relations in ancient societies is fragmentary in comparison to the data available to a sociologist studying a modern society. What we get, at best, is snapshots of social relations at a particular time and place. It is not always clear how (or whether) we can generalize from these snapshots about the moving picture which is social reality. Despite these unfortunate limitations, social scientific insights assist us in formulating questions and making better sense of the evidence we do have.

The principal sources for this study are literary, archaeological and epigraphic. Although evidence for associations is derived primarily from inscriptions, there are some references to these groups in literature, especially references to associations' involvements in what upper-class authors in the ancient world considered noteworthy historical incidents (e.g. civic disturbances and authorities' control of them). Evidence for synagogues in Roman Asia is also primarily epigraphic, though documents preserved by Josephus and other writings such as the *Sibylline Oracles* also provide some useful information. In the case of Christ-devotees, the evidence happens to be solely

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5 On social scientific approaches to ancient history and early Christianity see, for example: Carney 1975; Malina 1981; Finley 1985; Elliott 1993a; Holmberg 1990; White 1992. On history and the social sciences, see Burke 1992 [1980].

literary, and I discuss the reasons for this lack of material remains in chapter eight. Literary sources pertinent to this region, including John's Apocalypse, 1 Peter, the Pastoral epistles, Ignatius' epistles, the *Acts of Paul*, and the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, will occupy us primarily in the third part of this study.

Archaeological sources and methods are fundamental to this study. Buildings, monuments, plaques, statues, and other artifacts are an essential source of information concerning life in the ancient world, often providing an alternative perspective to that offered by literary sources produced by the elites. Most information about associations, as with local social and cultural life generally, comes from extant Greek and Latin texts inscribed in stone for different purposes (epigraphy). These inscriptions include gravestones (epitaphs); decrees or regulations of cities or groups; official decisions and letters of local magistrates, governors or emperors; and various kinds of monumental honors presented by individuals, groups, and civic institutions for benefactors (whether humans or gods) in response to benefits conferred or desired. These include dedications of altars, plaques, statues, and buildings (see the figures throughout this study for visual examples). Epigraphic evidence provides a window into concrete and otherwise obscure aspects of life. "Though we must always be conscious of how much inscriptions will *not* tell us," states Fergus Millar (1983, 81), "it is still the case that inscriptions, read in bulk, provide the most direct access which we can have to the life, social structure, thought and values of the ancient world." Much progress has been made in the collection and translation of inscriptions and papyri pertaining to associations since the first edition of this book in 2003. In particular, Richard S. Ascough, John S. Kloppenborg, and myself have published both the one-volume *Associations in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook* (Baylor University Press, 2012) and the multi-volume scholarly *Greco-Roman Associations* (de Gruyter, 2012- ). Furthermore, the collection and translation of inscriptions and papyri continues in an online database: *Associations in the Greco-Roman World: A Companion to the Sourcebook* <<http://philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/>>. Throughout the present work, you may click on an inscription's abbreviation or on category links to be taken to a specific inscription or papyrus, where original Greek or Latin texts and an English translation is often provided.

The value and significance of these artifacts is certainly not limited to their texts, and I try to remain attentive to the visual and symbolic messages of archaeological remains. The building remains of associations that have been uncovered, for instance, communicate something about what these groups did and what they felt was important. Paul Zanker's study on the *Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (1988, 3) vividly demonstrates how visual imagery and the pictorial language of monuments, statues, buildings, ceremonies, and other objects "reflects a society's inner life and gives insight into people's values and imagination that often cannot be apprehended in literary sources." At various points in this study I draw attention to the symbolic significance of monuments and buildings. *Monumentalizing* (as I call the activity of erecting such monuments and inscriptions) could involve concrete statements or assertions regarding the place of an individual, group, or community within society and the cosmos, as we shall see.

Having noted the great evidential value of inscriptions, it is important to remain aware of the difficulties involved in using such sources. First of all, there is the paucity and partial nature of epigraphic evidence. Only certain types of activities, mentioned above, were recorded in stone.

Added to this is that inscriptions which have been discovered and published represent only a small portion of those that did exist or which may be discovered in the future. There are difficulties, then, in deciding whether a particular piece of evidence is or is not representative of common practices or social relations. Moreover, the material remains we do possess reflect only a small portion of social and cultural life in antiquity; they certainly do not provide a complete picture. A second related difficulty is that there is often a lack of context for interpreting a specific inscription. Information for a particular person or group may derive solely from one fragmentary and partially reconstructed inscription, and sometimes the inscription may lack indication of date or context. This is why inscriptions should be studied in bulk with attention to regional factors. Studying groups of inscriptions can tell us something about life in the ancient world that an individual gravestone cannot. Finally, we should not imagine that the problems of interpretation disappear when we are working with concrete remains, presuming that these sources speak to us in an uncomplicated manner.

In some respects, my approach to archaeological evidence differs from some other scholars who have used material remains to shed light on early Christian history and literature. Colin J. Hemer's (1986) study of the opening letters of John's Apocalypse illustrates a common approach to archaeological evidence among some scholars. Hemer systematically works through the opening letters of the Apocalypse attempting to correlate references in the literary evidence to the concrete local environments of the seven cities. Archaeological materials are often removed from their broader contexts. For Hemer, the Christian literary evidence dictates the selection and interpretation of artifacts from the Greco-Roman world.

My method is quite different as I attempt to approach artefactual evidence concerning social and cultural phenomena in local contexts *on their own terms* before turning to questions of how this might shed light on early Christianity or Judaism. Epigraphic and archaeological evidence should not merely be interpreted in light of literary evidence produced by those who were educated. Rather material remains should be understood on their own terms, realizing that they can provide alternative views of social realities.

### Outline of this Study

The book is divided into three main parts, dealing with associations in Roman Asia (chapters 1-3), associations and imperial aspects of society (chapters 4-6), and synagogues and congregations within cities in this same region (chapters 7-9).

*Part one* introduces associations, their internal lives and their environments. Along with its links to the primary sources, this part could readily be used on its own as an introduction to associations in courses on Greco-Roman religions or on social life in antiquity. The first chapter provides an overview of the inscriptional evidence for associations in Roman Asia, clarifying what groups are encompassed by this study. I use the term "associations" to refer to small, *unofficial* groups (usually between 10-50 members) that met together on a regular basis for a variety of social, ritual, funerary,



and other purposes.<sup>6</sup> By “unofficial” I mean that such groups were *not* established or financially supported by civic or provincial institutions in an ongoing way. The first chapter elaborates on this definition and provides a *typology of associations*, focusing on social networks and issues of composition. I then turn to a general outline of the *internal life* of these groups, discussing interconnected social, cultic, and funerary functions which provided members of these groups with a sense of belonging (chapter two). In the process, I challenge a tradition within scholarship which tends to stress the social side of association–life to the neglect of other dimensions, including the importance of honors for deities. Chapter three considers the *civic framework* and the place of associations within the context of the city (*polis*) in the eastern part of the Roman empire, the Greek East. It is quite common for scholars to speak of associations (including the mysteries) as symptoms of decline, as compensatory phenomena in a period of social, cultural, and political degeneration. Yet this approach is problematic as the evidence for associations clearly shows.

*Part two* focuses on associations and imperial aspects of society and culture in the Roman province of Asia. These chapters provide extensive evidence concerning the interactions of associations within society and culture under Roman rule, which forces us to re-evaluate the predominant tension-centred approach of most scholarship. This material sheds light on the concrete ways in which these groups claimed and maintained a place for themselves in the city and empire. First I address the significance of the emperors and cultic honors for these “revered ones” within the *internal ritual life* of associations (chapter four). Contrary to a common scholarly paradigm, imperial cults were not solely political phenomena of little significance for the populace at the local level. These activities directed at the emperors and imperial family – or *imperial gods*, as I sometimes call them for convenience – also tell us something about how associations and their members understood their place within society and the cosmos. Second, I focus on *external relations* of associations. Evidence concerning ongoing *positive interactions* between associations and officials (local or provincial) and emperors (chapter five) should lead us to re-evaluate *areas of tension*, such as the intermittent involvement of associations in civic unrest and the intervention of imperial authorities (chapter six). Moreover, these imperial connections among associations illustrate mechanisms that linked inhabitants to the civic community and to Roman imperial power, holding the empire together. I also assess the symbolic significance of monumentalizing, suggesting that acts of erecting monuments and buildings could be concrete claims about one’s place within society and the cosmos.

*Part three* focuses on Judean synagogues and Christian congregations that lived alongside these other associations within the cities of Asia Minor. As with the chapters on associations, I re-evaluate the place of diverse groups within the social and cultural framework of city and empire. I begin by addressing theoretical and methodological issues in the *comparison of groups in antiquity* (chapter seven). It is quite common for scholars to categorize Judean synagogues and Christian assemblies as “sects” in a sociological sense, stressing their separation from, and conflict with,

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6 I exclude from primary consideration groups such as: the official age-based organizations of the gymnasia (*paides*, *ephēboi*, *neoi*, *gerontes/gerousia*); boards of functionaries officially involved in the ongoing management of civic sanctuaries or institutions; and, guilds of professional athletes (devoted to Herakles) or Dionysiac performers (actors, musicians, dancers), which often played an ongoing official role in civic festivals and engaged in somewhat exceptional diplomatic relations. For recent studies on Dionysiac performers, see Le Guen 2001 and Aneziri 2003.

surrounding society. This approach does not adequately account for variations among these groups and often obscures evidence regarding complexities in the interactions between groups and society. Insights from the social sciences on acculturation and dissimilation among cultural minority groups will provide a more fruitful approach to the question. Archaeological and inscriptional evidence for synagogues within the cities in Roman Asia will serve as a case in point, challenging the sectarian portrait and preparing the way for an extensive treatment of other primary evidence on imperial honors within both synagogues and congregations.

Comparing diverse associations with both synagogues and assemblies draws attention to areas of participation and non-participation, positive interaction and tension, among Judeans and Christ-devotees in relation to imperial and other aspects of civic life under Roman rule. There is substantial primary evidence concerning the *participation* of a significant number of synagogues and assemblies in imperial honors or connections (chapter eight). Re-reading this evidence of positive interactions within society in light of the discussion of associations in earlier chapters suggests that a broadly sectarian understanding of many synagogues and assemblies is no longer plausible. Moreover, there was a spectrum of perspectives and practices among both Judean and Christian groups (and individuals or leaders) regarding what degree of participation in imperial and other aspects of civic life was acceptable, ranging from the more open or moderate approaches of the Nicolaitans, 1 Peter and the Pastorals to the clearly sectarian approach of John's Apocalypse.

In light of this evidence for positive interactions, we need to reconsider other areas of tension, particularly with respect to Judeans' and Christians' *non-participation* in honoring the deities of others, including the emperors as gods (chapter nine). There has been, and continues to be, a strong tendency within scholarship to inflate the importance of imperial cults specifically in regard to issues of persecution and negative group-society relations. The result has been a portrait that wrongly sees imperial cults or worship of the emperors as the heart of a conflict between early Christianity and Roman society. It seems that most, or virtually all, Judeans and Christians did avoid active or full participation in rituals for the emperors and imperial family as gods. But proper attention to the actual nature of imperial cults and persecution (drawing on incidents from the times of emperor Trajan, Hadrian, and Antoninus Pius) suggests that this area of non-participation was a potential source of tensions only insofar as imperial cults were part and parcel of honors for Greco-Roman deities in the cities generally. Re-reading the Apocalypse of John in light of all of this furthers our comprehension of its audience and its author's rhetorical strategy. This shows how this particular Judean author perceived and reacted to some realities of life in the cities and in the congregations devoted to Christ, responding in a way that was quite different from the approach of other fellow Judeans and Jesus-followers in the same region.

Overall, this study draws attention to the ways in which diverse associations, synagogues, and congregations found a place for themselves within cities under Roman rule, despite individual or distinctive world views and practices in other regards. It also demonstrates the value in studying material remains from local contexts of the ancient Mediterranean. Doing so can provide new perspectives on the social history of groups and communities in specific localities, bringing to life the diversity of the Greco-Roman world. This can also transform our perceptions of Judeans and the closely related Christ-devotees within that world.



PART 1:

ASSOCIATIONS IN ASIA MINOR



# 1 / ASSOCIATIONS: SOCIAL NETWORKS AND MEMBERSHIP

## Introduction

Reviewing evidence for associations in an ancient city such as Smyrna, one notices gatherings of goldsmiths, fishermen, porters, hymn-singers, Dionysos-devotees, Demeter-devotees, Anubis-devotees, Caesar-devotees, Christ-devotees, and Judeans, among others. Before considering the place of such groups within the *polis* (ancient Greek city), it is important to discuss their nature and internal makeup and to provide a framework – a typology or taxonomy – for understanding the varieties or types of such groups. Here I outline the evidence for associations that existed in Roman Asia Minor and deal with questions regarding the social strata represented within these groups.

It is quite common for scholars to categorize associations based on their main purpose, be it religious, funerary or otherwise, but that approach can be problematic. Instead, here I pay special attention to the principal social network connections which formed the basis of an association's membership and which continued to inform a group's self-understanding. As I argue in this chapter, associations drew primarily on one (or more) of the following webs of social network connections:

- 1) links deriving from relationships of the extended family or household;
- 2) links arising from shared ethnic identity or geographic origin (i.e. immigrants);
- 3) links based on living in the same neighborhood or on the same street;
- 4) links formed through occupational activities; and,
- 5) links based on attendance at a particular deity's (or deities') sanctuary or attendance at ritual activities for a certain deity (including initiation into mysteries, for instance).

It is important to note that the typology I present here is exploratory and is not meant to be applied rigidly, for there were many associations that drew membership from more than one of these sets of social connections. Nevertheless, there are also many cases when we can detect the *principal* set of linkages that played a key role in the formation and identity of a given association.

The internal composition of membership in associations varied from one group to the next. Yet since the late nineteenth century, many scholars characterize the majority of associations as socially homogeneous groups, consisting principally of the poorest segments of society. Instead epigraphic evidence from Asia Minor suggests that association membership often reflected the social spectrum of urban society with the usual exception of a very small fraction of the population discussed below that may be characterized as the "imperial elites." The composition of groups ranged from relatively homogeneous to relatively heterogeneous membership in terms of social status and other factors. This insight will also have important implications for assessing the social constitution of associations devoted to the Judean God and to Jesus.

## Social Stratification in Greco-Roman Society

A brief discussion of social stratification in the Roman empire will provide context for our assessment of the socioeconomic profiles of associations here.<sup>1</sup> When it comes to scholarly evaluations of social stratification in the Roman empire, many studies in the past ten years rightly steer away from an overly dichotomous picture in which a miniscule elite is contrasted to a vast population of the undifferentiated “poor.” Critiquing or qualifying binary oppositions in the influential works of Moses Finley (1984) and Geza Alföldy (1985), for instance, some Roman historians and scholars of early Jesus groups focus more attention on developing nuanced models of socioeconomic stratification that recognize some diversity in economic levels and the presence of “middling groups,” particularly involving traders and artisans in the cities.<sup>2</sup> The discussion here, including my estimates of percentages of the population, is informed by these recent discussions.

By the imperial period there were four official orders or ranks (*ordines*, plural of *ordo*) from the Roman perspective: senatorial (senators), equestrian (knights), decurion (civic elites outside of Rome), and plebeian (the masses). At the very top of the Roman hierarchy were those belonging to the senatorial and equestrian orders, which I refer to as the *imperial elites* (probably less than 1% of the total population). The emperor and his direct family members were at the peak of power and influence. The senatorial aristocracy consisted of a few families (there were a total of about 600 members, all men, in the Roman senate) which were expected to possess property worth about one million sesterces (= 250,000 denarii). The supreme patron, the emperor, chose senators from among these families. There was a typical career path (*cursus honorum*) through which a senator could pass, culminating (sometimes) in the position of consul (the highest, annually elected official at Rome) and then proconsul (governor) of one of the more prestigious provinces (such as the Roman province of Asia).

Membership in the equestrian order required a minimum of 400,000 sesterces (= 100,000 denarii), and these knights filled the important offices within the army and sometimes moved into the more prestigious administrative positions in Rome and the provinces. Equestrian standing was also hereditary. Patronage connections within networks, especially links to the emperor himself, were an essential factor in advancement through the ranks appropriate to one’s official order. There were occasions when these connections together with success within a family from one generation to the next could mean movement from the equestrian to the senatorial order.

It is worth giving some sense of how this wealth of the senatorial and equestrian elites (ranging from 400,000–1,000,000 sesterces and more) compared to the income of others, including soldiers and average workers, about whose income we have only anecdotal though suggestive evidence. Although focusing primarily on Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, it is worth noting William T. Loomis’ (1998) extensive collection of the evidence of wages for that era, particularly since the rates he finds tend to line up with our anecdotal evidence from the Roman era.<sup>3</sup> Loomis

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1 On Roman social stratification, see, for instance, MacMullen 1974a, 88–121; Garnsey 1987, 107–25; Hopkins 1998; Friesen 2004; Scheidel 2006; Longenecker 2009; Scheidel and Friesen 2009. On social status as it relates to associations in the Western parts of the empire, see Verboven 2007.

2 See Scheidel 2006; Friesen 2004; Oakes 2004; Longenecker 2009.

3 Especially see Loomis’ appendix 1, pp. 261–312.

finds that daily pay rates for soldiers in the classical era usually ranged from about three obols (i.e. half a drachma) to one drachma (cf. Thucydides, 3.17.4), with a very few cases that exceeded one drachma. Rates for manual laborers who were primarily involved in construction work for civic building projects likewise ranged from about three obols (i.e. half a drachma) to one drachma, with a few cases of carpenters and masons exceeding one drachma, and with two and a half drachmas being the highest attested daily pay at Athens and Eleusis.<sup>4</sup>

Not much different than these figures from the earlier era was the yearly pay of Roman legionary soldiers, which increased from 225 to 300 denarii (i.e. from 900 sesterces to 1200 sesterces) under the emperor Domitian (Alston 1994, 114). Walter Scheidel gathers some useful, though anecdotal, data regarding the wages of manual laborers in the Roman imperial era: miners in Dacia were paid 28, 47, and 70 sesterces per month (336, 564, and 840 sesterces per year) and these numbers line up with the wages of miners in Egypt (see Scheidel and Friesen 2009, 70). This would amount to between 1.3 and 3.7 sesterces per work day (approaching 1 denarius at the high end), assuming about 225–250 work days per year. The parable of the vineyard in the gospel of Matthew (20:2), likely written towards the end of the first century, imagines 1 denarius (= 4 sesterces) as a realistic daily wage for vineyard labor. Scheidel notes that the same wage of 1 denarius is attested for a town scribe in Spain, a cistern supervisor in North Africa, and a worker in Pompeii. So, overall, a wage of 1 silver drachma or 1 denarius or 4 sesterces per day—roughly 1000 sesterces (= 250 denarii = 250 drachmas) per year—seems to be at the *higher end* of a realistic wage for average workers. At this rate, a typical person would need to work the equivalent of one thousand years (at 250 days per year) without spending any funds whatsoever on food, rent or other necessities to approach the one million sesterces of wealth required to be a senator.

This wealthy group of imperial elites had its counterparts, though usually on a more modest scale, in the *provincial elites* and *civic elites*, or decurions (perhaps about 10% or less of the urban population, and less than 3% of the total population on Friesen's [2004, 347] estimate). These were the aristocratic families of the provincial communities who assumed the more important positions in the cities, including membership on the civic Council (*boulē*), on boards of elected officials, or other important civic positions (e.g. civic president, director of contests, market-overseer). They, like the imperial elites, also played the social role of benefactors within the cities. From the mid- to late-first century, a very small number of these provincial families with imperial connections began to attain equestrian rank and, eventually, senatorial rank over the course of generations.

Below the imperial and civic elites lay the vast majority of the population (about 90% or more of the population), the plebeians or non-elites strata, including both rural peasant farmers and urbanites. The majority of the masses were peasant farmers in the countryside and villages, since the Roman economy was primarily agricultural.<sup>5</sup> A substantial portion of this population, particularly in rural areas, would be living near or at subsistence level. The city population is our central focus here, however, since most evidence for associations, synagogues, and assemblies comes from urban environments. Recent studies highlight the presence of persons of “middling” wealth within these segments of the population. Emanuel Mayer's study (2012) of the archeology

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4 Cf. Cohen 1992 on *IG I*<sup>2</sup> 373–374; *IG II*<sup>2</sup> 1672–1673, from 329 BCE.

5 Cf. MacMullen 1974b; Mitchell 1993, 1.165–97.



convincingly argues for an emerging class of artisans and traders in the centuries leading up to the imperial era. Although estimates vary, it is reasonable to propose that about 10% of the non-elite population of the entire empire (including *rural* populations) would have a moderate surplus of wealth; yet the percentage of the *urban* population with some surplus income would likely be larger, perhaps about 25% of the population in cities.<sup>6</sup>

For present purposes, it is important to note that socioeconomic *status* markers varied among these non-elite segments of the urban population specifically and that there were factors beyond just wealth at play. There were the important Roman legal status categories of free-born and slave-born (the latter including slaves or freedpersons) and the distinction between those with Roman citizenship and foreigners without Roman citizenship (until the period after 212 CE, when Roman citizenship was granted to all free men). Citizenship in the *polis* or city, which was only available to men, was a further factor in one's status. Beyond these more officially recognized categories, however, a variety of less formal factors affected one's social standing at the local level, including gender, family origin, ethnic background, occupation (artisans, traders, physicians, etc.), education, skill, and wealth.<sup>7</sup> So wealth was only one among many factors affecting social standing at the local level. Overall, there were occasions of inconsistency between one's position within the official Roman orders (i.e. plebeian) and one's actual status within a given civic setting (see Hopkins 1965). Sometimes those formally low on the social ladder, including traders and artisans, attained positions on civic boards or on the civic Council, for instance (cf. *IEph* 1487; *IEph* 1488; *IHierapJ* 156).

Scholars who attempt to place the evidence for the social composition of associations within these broader social structures often engage in generalizations which fail to account for distinctions and variations I aim to observe here. Jean-Pierre Waltzing (1895-1900), E. Kornemann (1901), and George La Piana (1927), for example, give the impression that the majority of associations ("burial clubs") were socially homogeneous, consisting of the poorest and most deprived strata of society. Wayne A. Meeks (1983, 78-80) and other scholars of early Christianity likewise generalize about the supposed *homogeneous* social makeup of associations, contrasting this with the socially inclusive or heterogeneous character of Pauline congregations. For Meeks this is one of several differences which make associations less than adequate models for comparison with groups of Christ-devotees.<sup>8</sup>

These approaches do not do justice to the range of possibilities in social composition among associations, nor to the varieties of such groups. Social status is a complex phenomenon that is difficult to measure, especially considering the fragmentary nature of our ancient evidence. Nonetheless, throughout this chapter I remain alert to several indicators of social standing among members of associations in Greek cities of Asia Minor, including wealth, family background, occupation, legal standing (free, freed, slave), gender, citizenship (civic or imperial), and roles in civic or imperial positions. Paying attention to such factors allows us to recognize a range of possibilities in the social composition of associations, with variety among types and differences from

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6 Friesen's (2004, 347) estimate for his category "moderate surplus" (PS4) was roughly 7%. Scheidel's 2006 chapter speaks of roughly 20-25% of the population in Egypt owning "enough land to enjoy a net surplus" (Scheidel 2006, 53-54). Friesen and Scheidel (2009) may be meeting half-way when they together estimate about 10% for those with middling wealth for the entire empire, both rural and urban populations.

7 On such status factors, see Hopkins 1965, 14; Meeks 1983, 54-55.

8 On the difficulties of Meeks' approach, see also Ascough 1997 and Harland 2009, 63-81.

one group to the next. Some could be more homogeneous, others more heterogeneous, in terms of the social standing and gender of group members.

### Typology of Associations: A New Framework

The issue of social composition has often been bound up in discussions of the types of associations. Most commonly, scholars of associations propose a three-fold typology based on apparent primary *purpose*: (1) occupational, (2) cultic (*collegia sodalicia*), and (3) burial (*collegia tenuiorum*).<sup>9</sup> Waltzing, La Piana and others argue that the majority of associations were of the burial type (*collegia tenuiorum*), consisting primarily of the poorest social strata of society who could not otherwise afford burial. Waltzing, echoing views of Theodor Mommsen (1843), can state that “many private associations, originally founded in order to honor a divinity, ended up regarding religion as an accessory and the funeral as their principal aim.”<sup>10</sup> These views are based, in part, on an assumption that the Roman authorities strictly controlled associations (from the time of Augustus) and that only burial clubs for the poor (*collegia tenuiorum*) were exempted from such laws, an assumption that I question in a later chapter.

There are several problems with such purpose-centred typologies. Waltzing’s categories (particularly the “burial association” category which he inherited from Mommsen) rest upon a questionable reading of legal sources. The topic cannot be discussed fully here, but studies by Frank M. Ausbüttel (1982, 22–23), John S. Kloppenborg (1996a, 20–23), Jonathan Scott Perry (1999, 2006) and Andreas Bendlin (2011, 223–237) argue that we lack evidence for the existence of associations devoted solely to burial, the so-called *collegia tenuiorum* or *funeraticia* which are so integral to this typology. Furthermore, sorting these groups based on supposed purpose can obscure other evidence which suggests that associations of various kinds served similar social, ritual, and funerary functions for their members. Franz Poland strikes to the heart of the matter when he states that “every association is in some sense a cult-association.”<sup>11</sup> Evidently, we need a more adequate framework in which to understand the composition and nature of these associations.

Kloppenborg’s (1996) work in this area provides a useful starting point. Recognizing the problems with traditional typologies, he suggests that it is more helpful to categorize associations based on the profile of their membership. In his view there were three main sources of membership based on household connections, shared occupation, and common cult, and all three types of associations served a variety of interrelated purposes. This focus on membership bases, rather than purpose, is fitting for our present aims but we can expand our view on this.

Sociological studies since the 1960s have increasingly recognized the importance of pre-existing social network connections for understanding the formation and growth of social, religious and other groups or movements, and this chapter is informed by such insights (see Stark and

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9 E.g. Waltzing 1895–1900, 1.32–56, 114–54; Kornemann 1901, 386–403; La Piana 1927, 239–44.

10 Waltzing 1895–1900, 1.46 (trans. mine): “Or, il arriva que beaucoup de ces collèges privés, fondés surtout pour adorer une divinité, finirent par regarder la religion comme l’accessoire et les funérailles comme leur but principal.” Cf. La Piana 1927, 243, 272.

11 Poland 1909, 5 (trans. mine): “In gewissem Sinne ist jeder Verein ein Kultverein, weil die religiösen Vorstellungen, vor allem die religiösen Feste fast überall von großer Bedeutung sind,” Cf. Dill 1956 [1904], 262–63.

Bainbridge 1985, 307–324 for discussion and bibliography). Relationships and interpersonal bonds established through social contacts help to explain how persons come to associate with one another in particular group-settings, as well as pointing towards sources for growth in membership.

Turning to social networks and structures in the societies of Roman Asia Minor, it is possible to distinguish five important sources of members for associations and, in some cases, certain groups drew members primarily from one particular type of social network. There were groups which drew membership primarily from 1) household or family connections, 2) ethnic or geographic connections, 3) neighborhood connections, 4) occupational connections, and 5) temple or ritual connections. These sets of social linkages are often inter-related with issues concerning the self-understandings or identities of particular associations, and these networks also provide clues regarding the socioeconomic standings of members.

### *1. Household Connections*

Links established in the household, or familial relationships, account for the membership, existence, and identity of a significant number of associations. Family networks encompassed a far greater set of relations in the ancient world (including slaves, ex-slaves, and other dependents) than in most modern western societies. Associations consisting of family members are attested in the Hellenistic era, including those founded by Epikteta on the island of Thera (*IG XII,3 330* = *AGRW* 243) and by Poseidonios at Halikarnassos (*LSAM* 72; both likely III BCE). The family of Agrippinilla, which originally lived at Mytilene on the island of Lesbos (opposite Pergamon) and emigrated to Torre Nova in Italy, provides an excellent example of a household-based association in the imperial era, in this case exhibiting influence from the homeland of Asia Minor. In about 160 CE, an association of four hundred “initiates” (*mystai*) in the mysteries of Dionysos (an exceptionally large group) honored Pompeia Agrippinilla, their priestess, with a statue (*IGUR* 160 = *AGRW* 330). Achille Vogliano’s study (1933) shows that many of this group’s functionaries come from the families of Agrippinilla and her husband, M. Gavius Squilla Gallicanus, who was consul in 150 CE and proconsul of Asia in 165 CE. The rest of the members, including both men (292) and women (110) of free, freed, and servile status, reflect dependents associated with that household (see Scheid 1986). This family association has parallels elsewhere. At Thermai Theseos (near Saittai) in Lydia, for instance, the “family” (*phamilia*) of C. Julius Quadratus living on his estate formed an association (*kollēgion*; *TAM V* 71; 140/141 CE). A priest of Dionysos near Bizye in Thrace “dedicated the altar to the god Zeus Dionysos for himself and my children who are fellow-initiates (*synmystai*) on account of salvation” (*IGBulg* 1864; cf. *IGBulg* 1865). Once such familial associations were formed, however, membership could sometimes expand to include others less directly affiliated with the household through friendship, occupation, or other relations within the network connections of individual family members.

An analogous household focus is apparent in the case of a group at Philadelphia in Lydia in the first century BCE (*LSAM* 20 = *AGRW* 121).<sup>12</sup> A man named Dionysios, who was head of the family, claimed to have received a dream in which Zeus supplied instructions regarding the entrance

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12 Cf. Weinreich 1919; Barton and Horsley 1981

of “men and women, free people and slaves” into a room in his home (cf. *IG X,2.1 255* = *AGRW* 52). There sacrifices and mysteries were to be performed regularly “in accordance with ancestral custom” in honor of deities, including Zeus and Agdistis (a deity associated or identified with the Mother of the Gods). The inscribed instructions outline numerous purity regulations for entrance and close with a prayer calling on Zeus to be well disposed to Dionysios and his family. Once again, as with the Agrippinilla association, membership in such familial associations could be relatively heterogeneous, reflecting the spectrum of social status levels of both genders that would naturally be associated with the household, in this case including both slaves and free persons.

The structures of the family and the networks of the household played a key role in the formation and expansion of some Christian congregations as well, which in this regard are not dissimilar from some family based associations.<sup>13</sup> A pattern of “conversion” and communal gathering portrayed in Acts, but also substantiated elsewhere, is indicative: again and again an entire family of dependents was baptized along with the head of the household and the home was subsequently used as a meeting-place (e.g. Acts 11:14; 16:15; 18:8; cf. 1 Cor 1:16; 16:19; Phlm 2; Rom 16:10–16; Col 4:15). As with the association founded by Dionysios at Philadelphia, household origins could be reflected in the relatively heterogeneous makeup of some groups of Jesus-followers, including masters and slaves and men and women in their ranks.

Before going on to ethnic associations, it is important to note that many associations of various types, even if they were *not* primarily family-based in membership or organization, could be influenced by the household with regard to (1) organizational structures and (2) the employment of familial language among participants. First, the influence of the organizational structures of the household can be concretely illustrated in architecture. L. Michael White (1997) shows that there was a common pattern among groups, whether “pagan,” Christian, or Judean. Many groups adapted local houses for communal use, depending on the generosity of a head of the household to supply the house (or rooms therein) or the funds needed to adapt the building. In light of such architectural and corresponding social origins, it is not surprising to find heads of households becoming the leaders. In this respect, the leadership and organization of many associations, synagogues, and congregations were influenced by the household and conventions of benefaction in the Greek East.

Second, the language of familial affection (e.g. “mother,” “father,” “brothers,” or “sisters”) does occur in Greco-Roman cultic contexts, including associations which do *not* involve actual families. Meeks’ influential study suggests that familial language (especially “brother” terminology) was rare within associations or “clubs,” and that the use of such language in Pauline groups illustrates their unique and “sectarian” character.<sup>14</sup> However, as I argue at length elsewhere, fictive sibling and parental language was used within cultic settings and associations throughout the ancient Mediterranean, including Asia Minor, Greece, the Danube, and the Bosporan kingdom.<sup>15</sup> There is no reason to discount such evidence when it does occur within associations while doing the contrary with respect to assemblies of Jesus-followers. So familial structures and terminology were influential for associations of all kinds. Yet there were also specific family-based associations (like

13 See, for instance, Filson 1939 and Klauck 1981.

14 Meeks 1983, 85–88, 225 n.73. Cf. Burkert 1987, 45.

15 Harland 2005a + Harland 2007 = Harland 2009, 61–96.

those of Agrippinilla in Italy and of Dionysios at Philadelphia) whose membership originally consisted principally of family-members.

## 2. Ethnic or Geographic Connections

A second principal basis of affiliation pertains to connections relating to geographical origins and ethnic identities. Immigrants could express their shared sense of ethnic identity by joining together in an association. (→ [Ethnic / immigrant association](#) category). A lively attention to ethnic or geographic origins and identity could be maintained while also finding a new home within the city or town of residence.

In Asia Minor there were many immigrants who formed associations. Those from Italy or from the city of Rome most commonly used the Greek self-designations “the Romans engaged in business” (*hoi pragmateuomenoi Rōmaioi*) or “the Roman settlers” (*hoi katoikountes Rōmaioi*).<sup>16</sup> Membership could include Romans or Italians involved in different forms of trade with varying socioeconomic status; some of these immigrants from Italy could assume local citizenship, attain considerable wealth, and become well known as benefactors within their cities of residence.<sup>17</sup> Immigrants from Egypt, like the “house” (*oikos*) of Alexandrians at Tomis in Scythia (*ITomis* 153 = *AGRW* 82), also formed associations, perhaps choosing Isis, Sarapis or other deities of the homeland as patrons.<sup>18</sup> Beyond the associations of Tyrians and Berytians found on the island of Delos in the mid-second century BCE, associations of immigrants from Syria and Phoenicia were found in different parts of the Roman empire, a topic that I explore elsewhere (*IDelos* 1519 = *AGRW* 223; *IDelos* 1520 = *AGRW* 224; see Harland 2009, 99–122).

In light of the tendency of Italians, Egyptians, Phoenicians, and others to congregate together, it is not surprising to find Israelites or Judeans (Jews) forming similar groups, sometimes using terminology common to other associations.<sup>19</sup> Besides the many epitaphs referring to individual Judeans and their families, there is literary and archaeological evidence for gatherings in numerous cities including Akmoneia, Aphrodisias, Ephesos, Hierapolis, Laodicea, Miletos, Pergamon, Philadelphia, Priene, Sardis, Smyrna, Thyatira, and Teos (→ [Judeans in the diaspora](#) category). It is worth noting that in some cases these Judeans had lived for decades and sometimes centuries at a particular locale, something which should caution us in over-emphasizing their “alien” status (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.147–53). This long-term settlement also meant that non-Judeans (“gentiles”) with varying levels of attachment could begin to affiliate with a given synagogue, including those traditionally labeled “god-fearers” (*theosebeis*).

Occupational and neighborhood networks sometimes help to explain why a particular Judean

16 E.g.: *IAdrammytt* 19, 21; *IAssos* 14, 19–21, 28; *IPhrygR* 474, 511, 533 (Akmoneia and Sebaste); *IGR* IV 785–94 (Apameia Kelainai); *IEph* 409, 646, 884, 738, 800, 2058, 3019, 3025; *IIsos* 90; *IGR* IV 903–905, 913, 916–19 (Kibyra); *SEG* 28 [1978], no. 953 = *NewDocs* IV 2 (Kyzikos); *IHierapJ* 32; *IGR* IV 860, *IPhyrgR* 2 (Laodicea); *IGR* IV 294, 1169 (Pergamon and Attaleia); *IGR* IV 1644 (Philadelphia); *SEG* 46 (1996), no. 1521 (Sardis); *ISmyrna* 534; *TAM* V 924, 1002–1003 (Thyatira); *ITrall* 77, 80, 83, 145.

17 See Hatzfeld 1919, 101–131, 148–174, 297–309; Broughton 1938, 544.

18 Cf. *IGR* I 392 (Ostia), 446 (Neapolis), 800 (Heraklea-Perinthos, Thracia); *SEG* 47 [1997], no. 2325.

19 E.g. *synagōgē*, *oikos*, *katoikountes*, *synodos*, *hetairoi*, *ethnos*; cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.215–16 (*thiasos*), 235 (*synodos*).



associated with one synagogue rather than another in cities where several existed. For example, of the eleven attested Judean associations in the city of Rome (some of which existed simultaneously), it appears that three derive their name from the district where they lived: the Calcaresians probably from the Lime-burners' district, the Campesians from the Campus Martius, and the Siburesians (*sic*) from the Subura district. Two others may very well have been founded by Judeans initially from cities elsewhere: the Tripolitans from the city of their namesake either in Phoenicia or North Africa, and the "synagogue of Elaia," perhaps consisting of some members formerly residents or citizens of Elaia (south of Pergamon) in Asia Minor (see [AGRW 329](#); Leon 1995 [1960], 135–66). Both neighborhood and occupational factors played a subsidiary role in the organization of the Judean population at Alexandria in Egypt: there were certain streets and districts known for the presence of Judeans (cf. Philo, *Against Flaccus* 55; *CPJ* III 454, 468) and some synagogues included sub-groups organized by occupation, including goldsmiths, silversmiths, and clothing-workers, according to a passage in *Tosefta Sukkah* (4.6).<sup>20</sup>

There are some indications of the socioeconomic makeup of Judean associations. Although much of the evidence for Judean civic citizenship in the first two centuries is notoriously complex and ambiguous, it seems that individual Judeans could sometimes gain local citizenship and, at least after 212 CE, attain civic office (cf. Digest 50.2.3.3).<sup>21</sup> Evidence for diaspora Judeans suggests a range of occupational possibilities similar to those of non-Judeans, including artists, physicians, workers in food production or sale, workers in clothing production or sale, and smiths working with gold or bronze.<sup>22</sup> But there were also wealthier Judeans or Judean families who owned slaves and could afford to provide a local synagogue with a place to meet or the funds to decorate one that existed (cf. [IJO II 36](#) = *AGRW* 105, from Phokaia; [IJO II 43](#) = *AGRW* 196, from Smyrna).

Similar associational tendencies were at work among those who emigrated from Asia Minor, moving elsewhere in the empire for business or other reasons (including trade, military service, or other purposes). There were "corporate bodies" (*politeumata*) of Lycians and Pisidians living in Sidon in Phoenicia in the Hellenistic era ([AGRW 271–274](#)), as well as Lycians, Cilicians, and Ionians (some of them soldiers) in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt (*SB* 6025, 6664, 7270 [*politeuma*]; *OGIS* 145–48, 157 [*koinon*]; *SB* 8757 = *IGR* I 1078; cf. Lüderitz 1994).

Several immigrant groups from Asia Minor are attested in Italy, including Sardians, Ephesians, and Nysaiaans at Rome ([IGUR 86](#) = *AGRW* 324; *IGR* I 147; Clerc 1885, side B). The "corporate body" (*politeuma*) of Phrygians devoted to the Great Mother at Pompeii had its counterparts at Rome, where these associations consisted, in part, of freedmen and slaves of Phrygian background who belonged to the imperial household ([IAlexandriaK 74](#) = *AGRW* 316, found at Pompeii; La Piana 1927, 289–302).

20 See Applebaum 1974a, 476; Kasher 1985, 352–53.

21 See Applebaum 1974b; Trebilco 1991, 167–85; Barclay 1996.

22 Attested professions of Judeans in the diaspora (from *CIJ*) include: painter (*CIJ* 109), butcher (210), teacher (333, 594, 1158c, 1266, 1268, 1269), soldier (79), slave (556, 619e), wine-seller (681b), physician (600, 745), purple-dyer (777), boot-seller (787), silk-manufacturer (873), baker (902, 940), seller of small wares (928), clothing-cleaner (929), linen-seller (931), and goldsmith (1006). See Horst 1991, 99–101. The Aphrodisias inscription includes the following: goldsmith, green-grocer, bronze-smith, confectioner, poulterer, rag-dealer (Reynolds and Tannenbaum 1987). Philo mentions that Judeans in Alexandria were involved in trade as shippers, merchants, and artisans (*Against Flaccus* 57).

Asians who emigrated to regions such as Macedonia, Thrace, and Italy were especially likely to gather together in the form of societies devoted to the mysteries of Dionysos which were so familiar to them at home.<sup>23</sup> There was a Dionysiac “company (*speira*) of Asians” both at Dionysopolis and at Montana in Moesia (*IGBulg I* 23 = *AGRW* 71; *IGBulg II* 480 = *AGRW* 77; II–III CE).<sup>24</sup> A benefactor named Marcus supplied the pillars for a “Baccheion of Asians,” dedicating his gift on behalf of the emperors and the civic institutions of Perinthos in Thracia (*IPerinthos* 56 = *AGRW* 64; 196–98 CE). Several inscriptions from Thessalonica attest to a “society (*thiasos*) of Asians” there (*IG X,2* 309, 480; Edson 1938, 154–58, no. 1).

Contrary to a tradition in scholarship, extra-local links could play a significant role in the lives of some associations, especially those for whom ethnic, civic or regional identities persisted (cf. Ascough 1997). The settlement (*katoikountes*) of Tyrian merchants (from Syria) at Puteoli in Italy, for instance, wrote to their homeland for financial assistance in paying the rent for their building. The city of Tyre responded by asking another group of Tyrian merchants, the one at Rome, to help those at Puteoli (*OGIS* 595 = *AGRW* 317; ca. 174 CE). Similar examples of the continuation of inter-regional contacts could be cited for other associations, including Syrians and Phoenicians who settled elsewhere (see Harland 2009, 99–122).

### 3. Neighborhood Connections

Social connections within neighborhood networks form a third basis of membership for associations (→ *Neighborhood group* category). Inhabitants of a particular street, district or neighborhood could act together corporately, sometimes becoming an ongoing group with purposes comparable to other types of associations. What interests us here are those groups which continued to *identify themselves* primarily in terms of locational considerations. There are three main terms used by such groups: “settlement / settlers” (*katoikountes*), “neighborhood” (*geitosynē*, *geitniasis*), and “street” (*plateia*).

At Pergamon in Mysia “settlers on the acropolis” set up honors for the emperor Nero (*IPergamon* 394) and, about a century later, for L. Cuspius Pactumeius Rufinus, a Roman consul who was also priest of Zeus Olympios (*IPergamon* 434). Rufinus was also honored by another neighborhood group called “the settlers on Paspareitai street,” which included one clothing dyer as supervisor (*IGR IV* 425 = *AGRW* 118). Though such location-based groups could include a mixture in terms of occupation or gender, persons living or working on a particular street were more likely to reflect similar social brackets of society.

There were similar “neighborhood” associations in the regions of Lydia and Phrygia. At Saittai (east of Thyatira) a neighborhood (*geitosynē*) honored a member on his epitaph (*TAM V* 90 [198 CE]). At Orkistos “those from the neighborhood of the adjacent countryside,” who are also called members of a brotherhood (*phratorōn*), set up an offering for a god in fulfillment of a vow after their prayer had been answered (*IGR IV* 548). An epitaph from third-century Akmonia which may have a Judean or Christian connection involves another association of this type. Aurelius Aristas

23 Cf. Edson 1948, 154–158; Nilsson 1957, 50–51.

24 Cf. Sauciuc-Săveanu 1924, 126–144, nos. 1–2 (Kallatis, Moesia); *IHistria* 99, 199 (Histria, Moesia); *IGBulg* 1517 (Cillae, Thracia; 241–44 CE; cf. Nilsson 1957, 50–51).

promises “the neighborhood of those by the gateway” tools if they fulfill their obligation by putting roses on his wife’s grave once a year (*IPhrygR* 455–57). Similar neighborhood associations are attested elsewhere in Asia Minor, as at Prusa in Bithynia and Termessos in Pamphylia.<sup>25</sup>

Groups whose membership consisted of those who lived or worked on a particular “street” (*plateia*) will serve as an appropriate transition to occupational associations. Numerous associations at Apameia Kelainai in Phrygia (north-east of Colossae) identified themselves by the colonnaded street where they worked. On several occasions in the mid-second century, the civic institutions (Council and People) joined with the settlement of Romans to honor prominent civic functionaries and priests. In each case one of three different street associations set up the honorary decree “from their own resources”: those from Bath (Thermaia) street (see photo in figure 4), the artisans (*techneitai*) from Shoemaker street, and the traders (*ergastai*) from Bath street (*IGR* IV 788–789, 790, 791). Similar street-associations, some of them clearly of an occupational nature, are known at Ephesos, Mylasa, Saittai, and Smyrna in Asia, as well as Sura in Lycia and Canathai in Arabia.<sup>26</sup>



Figure 4: Monument erected by the Thermaia street association at Apameia Kelainai.

#### 4. Occupational Connections

One’s occupation and the networks of relations it entailed were in many ways a determining factor in social affiliations.<sup>27</sup> Membership in an occupational association or “guild” (*synergasia*, the most common designation) was less than “voluntary” in the sense that, if one was a dyer or merchant, one naturally or by default associated with one’s fellow-workers in the guild of dyers or merchants. Still, it was possible to maintain simultaneous affiliations with, or memberships in, more than one

<sup>25</sup> See *IPrusaOlymp* 50 (II CE); *IPrusiasHyp* 63–64 (ca. 102–14 CE); *TAM* III 765 (Termessos).

<sup>26</sup> *IEph* 454, *IEph* 3080; *IMylasa* 403; *TAM* V 79; *ISmyrna* 714; *IGR* III 711; *IGR* III 1230. Cf. Robert 1937, 529–38.

<sup>27</sup> For recent studies of occupational associations in the Greek East, see Dittmann-Schöne 2000, Zimmermann 2002, and Sommer 2006. For studies of the Western provinces, see Tran 2006, Liu 2009, Dondin-Payre and Tran 2012, and the articles edited by Verboven in *Ancient Society* 41 (2011).



association at a time.<sup>28</sup> In considering associations deriving from occupational networks as a separate category, we must not forget the important role of familial factors here as well. It was common practice in antiquity for sons to follow in their father's footsteps when it came to profession, so it would not be surprising to find particular families at the forefront of certain guilds from one generation to the next.

A wide range of these occupational associations existed in the cities and villages of Asia Minor. There were associations of bakers, fishers, and farmers, as well as builders and physicians. Associations of clothing producers were found throughout Asia Minor, especially in Phrygian towns such as Thyatira, where there were guilds of clothing-cleaners, leather-cutters, leather-tanners, linen-workers, and dyers. Producers and sellers of other amenities, such as potters, smiths in copper, silver and gold, and merchants and shippers who dealt in various goods likewise formed such groups. Festivals in honor of gods and goddesses were an essential aspect of social and cultural life, which is reflected in the prominence of guilds of performers devoted to Dionysos and athletes devoted to Herakles, whose position and prestige relative to many other guilds was quite high.

Social networks associated with occupation and trade could be a key factor in the formation and ongoing life of some groups devoted to Jesus. When a leader like Paul traveled to cities such as Ephesos, Corinth or Thessalonica, it seems, the workshop and social connections based on occupation played a significant role.<sup>29</sup> We should not take Celsus' predominantly lower-class characterization of Christ-devotees at face value (he was a strong critic). Yet there is truth in Celsus' observation, about a century after Paul, that attachments through workshops of wool-workers, shoemakers, and clothing-cleaners continued to be a key source for new recruits (in Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.55). In light of the importance of work-settings, then, it is not surprising to find assemblies whose membership seems to derive primarily from networks associated with occupation or trade, such as those at Thessalonica discussed at length by Richard S. Ascough (2000, 2003). Paul emphasizes his own hand-work in identifying with these particular Christians, even mentioning that he and his companions "worked night and day . . . while we preached to you the good message of God" (1 Thess 2:9, 4:9-12; cf. 2 Thess 3:6-15). In cases where a congregation drew its membership primarily from occupational or business networks, the makeup of the group could be more homogeneous both in socioeconomic level and gender makeup than was the case with some other associations.

This brings us to the social composition of occupational associations more generally. The social status of craftsmen and traders is especially important here since we find such persons within many types of associations beyond just guilds, including Christian assemblies and Judean synagogues. The upper class disdain for work of any kind, especially manual labor but also trading or commerce generally, is abundantly clear in literary sources spanning the centuries from Herodotus (fifth century BCE) to Lucian (second century CE), though there were exceptions to this among some philosophers.<sup>30</sup> A statement by Plutarch is indicative of views among elite writers: "[while] we delight in the [artistic] work, we despise the workman . . . it does not necessarily

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28 See Meiggs 1960, 321-22; Digest 47.22.1.2 = *AGRW* L53; Harland 2009, 156-160.

29 Cf. Acts 18:2-3; Malherbe 1983 [1977], 89-91 on Acts 19:9; Hock 1980.

30 Cf. Herodotus, *Histories* 2.167-68; Xenophon, *On Household Management* 4.1-6.10; Aristotle, *On Household Management* 1.2.2-3; Lucian, *The Dream* 9; Pseudo-Socrates, *Epistles* 8, 9, 12, 18.

follow that, if the work delights you with its graces, the one who wrought it is worthy of your esteem" (*Pericles* 1.4–2.1, 2 [LCL]). Similarly, Cicero includes all work involving manual labor among the "vulgar" (*sordidus*) means of livelihood, "for no workshop can have anything liberal about it." He highlights the vulgarity of "fish-dealers, butchers, cooks, poulterers, and fishermen." Other professions, he admits, involved a "higher degree of intelligence," such as physicians, architects, and teachers, and therefore were less undesirable. Still, the true gentleman was supposed to derive his wealth not from trade or manual labor but from "agriculture," that is, land-ownership (Cicero, *On Offices* 1.150–51).<sup>31</sup> The status of workers of any occupation was extremely low, "vulgar," from the perspective of many educated or elite authors, with some exceptions (cf. Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 7.113–17).

In spite of this expression of general disdain in literature, however, it seems that workers' understanding of their own occupation and status in relation to the civic community where they lived was often quite different. Alison Burford's study stresses that workers and artisans "shared to some extent a positive attitude towards their profession, which gave them all a certain confidence and independence of mind in the face of whatever pressures the rest of society saw fit to bring to bear upon them."<sup>32</sup> Recent work on archeological evidence by Emanuel Mayer (2012) further confirms that many artisans and traders looked positively on their trade and developed an alternative cultural perspective on labor to that of the literary elites. Artisans often identify themselves by occupation on gravestones, sometimes depicting their tools or a workshop scene in relief.<sup>33</sup> The very existence of guilds is a testimony to the identity and pride that characterized workers of many trades, such that they would attempt and succeed to find a place as a group within the city, even maintaining contacts with the civic and provincial elites. The aristocracy's actual benefactions and other positive relations with guilds did not necessarily reflect the disdain expressed in literary sources.

Although craftsmen and traders were primarily part of the non-elite segments of society, there was nevertheless some range of wealth and status within these strata from which the guilds and other associations drew their membership. Certain occupations might be considered more desirable or conducive to gaining wealth than others. Shippers or traders, for instance, could hope to attain greater wealth and prestige within the wider community than, say, local tanners whose work involved undesirable odours and clothing-cleaners whose labor by nature involved the burning of sulphur and urine.<sup>34</sup> In the case of clothing production, the status of those who produced luxurious clothing, such as the purple-dyers, might exceed that of the regular clothing workers and dyers involved in the production of daily clothing for locals, though any of these occupations could also include ex-slaves.<sup>35</sup> Silversmiths or goldsmiths who produced the statues that were so necessary for appropriately honoring the gods, as well as the luxury items purchased by the rich, might hope to attain greater wealth or prestige within the city in comparison with some other occupations, at least in cities such as Ephesos. One silversmith there was on the Artemis sanctuary's board of

31 Cf. Finley 1985a [1973], 35–61; D'Arms 1981.

32 Burford 1972, 27. See also Joshel 1992; Ruffing 2004; Mayer 2012.

33 See Burford 1972, figures 3–24, 41, and 46–48; Mayer 2012, 100–120.

34 See Lucian, *Navigation*; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonios* 4.32; D'Arms 1981.

35 Cf. Pleket 1983, 139–40; *NewDocs* II 3. On guilds and clothing production, now see Labarre and Le Dinahet 1996.

management (*syndrion* or *synagōgē* of *neopoioi*), a fairly well-respected civic position in the first century (*IEph* 2212 = *AGRW* 161; cf. Acts 19:23–41). Physicians, who possessed some degree of education, would often be viewed as a step above many other professions in terms of social status (cf. Nutton 1977; *GCRE* 38 [74 CE]). So guilds could reflect a range of status within local society.

Many craftsmen and traders, as citizens of the city, commonly played a role as participants in civic assemblies of the People (see chapter three). There were even a few cases when individuals of particular occupations achieved local prestige and wealth that led to the assumption of other important civic positions, such as a slave-merchant (*sōmatemporos*) at Thyatira who assumed the relatively important position of market-overseer (*agoranomos*; cf. *TAM V* 932). There are also cases of craftsmen, traders or other workers attaining membership in the civic Council (*boulē*): shippers at both Ephesos in Ionia and Nikomedia in Bithynia, a member of the purple-dyer's guild at Hierapolis, Judean goldsmiths at Sardis, and even a baker at Korykos in Cilicia (*IEph* 1487; *SEG* 27 [1977], no. 828; *IHierap* 156; *DFSJ* 22–23; *MAMA* III 756; I–III CE).

In light of the discussion so far, the membership in most occupational associations might be described as *relatively homogeneous*, consisting primarily of men from a common socioeconomic bracket. However, there are some important qualifications which should be made here. Although not widely attested, it is possible that some occupational guilds included women in their number, particularly in the case of occupations for which there is evidence of women's engagement.<sup>36</sup> Hans-Joachim Drexhage's (1992) study of women's occupations in Hellenistic Egypt, for instance, finds the presence of women in the production and sale of food, the production and sale of clothing, and in trading various other goods, both locally and regionally. One wonders whether Lydia the purple-dyer from Thyatira (Acts 16:11–15) or Elpis the purple-dealer at Kos, buried alongside a fellow-worker (*CIG* 2519), would have affiliated with an association of others who shared their occupations. This being said, the most widely attested links between women and guilds are cases where the woman in question was a wealthy benefactor or the recipient of honors rather than an ordinary member.

Another point which should caution against the notion that all guilds were homogeneous are cases where a range of wealth and social status is evident in a particular group, despite the members sharing a common profession. A case involving fisheries at Ephesos is instructive (*IEph* 20 = *AGRW* 162). In the mid-first century, the fishermen and fish-dealers (*hoi halieis kai opsariopōlai*) dedicated the fishery toll-office to the imperial family, the Ephesian People, and the Roman People (see the photo of this monument in figure 2). Approximately 100 donors (89 are legible) are listed who, together with their families, contributed towards the building. The contributors are listed in order of the size of donation ranging from the four columns donated by Publius Hordeonius Lollianus with his wife and children to those who gave five denaria or less. If we can assume that most or all the listed male donors were members of this association, which is a good possibility,<sup>37</sup> then the amounts of donations may be taken to reflect the spectrum of wealth among fishery workers at Ephesos. Furthermore, studies by G. H. R. Horsley (1989) and Steven Michael Baugh

36 On women's occupations, see Wilhelm 1932 (physicians); Kampen 1981; Minnen 1986 (shippers or ship-owners); Minnen 1987; Saavedra Guerrero 1991; Drexhage 1992.

37 Another possibility proposed by Ephraim Lytle (2012, 220) is that the "individuals listed provided funds *in addition* to the contributions of the association of fishermen and fishmongers" (i.e. they are not all fishermen).

(1990) demonstrate that this donor list included Roman citizens of freed and free status (43–44 members; approximately 50% of the legible names), persons of non-servile status (between 36 and 41 members; about 45%), and several slaves (between 2 and 10 members; 3% or more). The presence of so many possessing Roman citizenship, some of whom had sufficient wealth to build several columns, should caution us in assuming that Cicero’s view of fish-dealers as “vulgar” necessarily represents the actual socioeconomic status of workers in this profession. It is likely that some other guilds, for which we lack such a detailed donation list, included a mixture of members of free, freed and servile status with differing levels of wealth.

### *5. Connections Arising from Attendance at Places of Worship*

Appropriately honoring deities by means of offerings and other rituals (sacrifices, prayers, singing) in a group setting was a concern of virtually all types of associations, as explained in the next chapter. Nonetheless, there are associations whose membership appears to draw primarily from social networks associated with honoring a specific deity in a given cult or sanctuary, and sometimes such groups highlighted their continuing devotion by including the name of the deity or deities in the self-designation of the association. Here we are concerned with ongoing, unofficial groups of what we could call lay-persons, *not* with official boards of temple functionaries or other groups formed and financially supported by the city, although the line between the two is sometimes blurry. Even so, unofficial associations could sometimes continue to meet within a sanctuary and occasionally participate as a group within the activities of a larger cult.



*Figure 5: Relief of two gods from Maionia, likely Men Tiamou as sun god and Men Tyrannos as moon god (TAM V 536).*



Figure 6: Monument from Maionia with a relief of the god Men in Phrygian garb with his left foot on the head of a prostrate bull and Zeus holding an eagle (TAM V 537).

There was an array of such associations in Asia Minor during the Roman era, including those devoted to Apollo, Aphrodite, Artemis, Asklepios, Zeus, and the emperors as gods (*Sebastoi*), as well as heroes, just to name a few.<sup>38</sup> Here I discuss for illustration groups devoted to the deities Men, Sabazios, Isis and Sarapis, Demeter and Kore, Dionysos, and the Israelite or Judean God (including followers of Jesus). Although the social status and gender of membership in these associations is often elusive, there are some indications which are worth noting. The god Men or Mensis, who was often pictured in Phrygian dress, including a cap, was a native deity of Phrygia (inland central Asia Minor) associated with the moon (see the image in figure 5). E. N. Lane's study (1971) of those who dedicated monuments to the god Men suggests that they were primarily free persons or

38 Apollo Pleurenos: SEG 46 (1996), nos. 1519–1520 (Sardis; I BCE). Aphrodite: IEpH 1202; Mordtmann 1885, 204–207, no. 30 (Kyzikos; I BCE); ILindos 252, 391–94 (ca. 10 CE), SEG 41 (1991), no. 654 (Rhodes). Zeus: MAMA X 304, CIG 38571 (Aizanoi); SEG 40 (1990), no. 1192 (Akmoneia); IPhyrgR 30–31 (Thiunta village, near Hierapolis; II CE); IPhyrgR 127 (Ormeleis/Killania; 207 CE); IG XII.1 161–162 (Rhodes); TAM V 536–37 (Maionia, near Thyatira; 171 CE); ISardBR 22 (ca. 100 BCE); IApamBith 116 (near Byzantion). Heroes: IEpH 3334 (late-I CE); TAM V 1098 (Thyatira; I CE).

peasants from a variety of occupations, but a few were slaves. Associations dedicated to this god were either solely male or a mixture of both men and women.<sup>39</sup> There were several associations devoted to this god in the area of Saittai in Lydia, for instance. At Maionia, an all male group with 18 members made a vow to both Zeus Masphalatenos and Men Tiamou, with the latter pictured subduing a bull ([TAM V 537](#) = *CMRD* I 54; see figure 6). At Collyda, seven or eight women are included in list of “ritual-purifiers” (44 members in total) devoted to Men Tiamou and Men Petraeitou ([TAM V 351](#) [161 CE]; cf. [TAM V 490](#)).

Sabazios was another native Anatolian deity, sometimes associated with Dionysos. In cases where we can discern the membership in associations devoted to Sabazios, men predominate, although the Sabaziasts at Teos honor a woman named Eubola on her grave, perhaps indicating her previous membership ([CCIS II 28](#)), and some wives are mentioned in a dedication by initiates of Zeus Sabazios at Ormeleis (near Kibyra; [CCIS II 43](#) [207–208 CE]). The Sabaziasts at Rhodes, for example, worship the god in a “male-clubhouse” (*andrōn*; [CCIS II 46](#) [ca. 100 BCE]). Moving outside of our regional focus, a similar association in the Piraeus in Attica consisted of 51 men, both Athenian citizens and immigrants, including members from Antioch, Miletos, Macedonia, Laodicea, and elsewhere ([CCIS II 51](#) [ca. 100 BCE]). If the poor writing on the monuments for Sabazios is any indication, many devotees of this god were of lesser economic means and little education (cf. Lane 1989, 7–8, 45).

There were also many associations of initiates (*mystai*) in “the mysteries” in Asia Minor, including those devoted to Isis and Sarapis, the Mother of the Gods (or Cybele), Demeter and Kore, and Dionysos. Alongside the staple ritual of sacrifice, “mysteries” (*mystēria*, *orgia*, *teletai*) were among the most respected ways of honoring deities in numerous contexts. The term mysteries could encompass a variety of practices, including sacrifice, communal meals, re-enactment of the myths of the gods, sacred processions, and hymn-singing. Most important for initiation into such associations was the unveiling of sacred symbols by the “revealer of the sacred objects” (*hierophantēs*), often by lamp-light.

Associations devoted to Egyptian deities, especially initiates in the mysteries of Isis and Sarapis (see figure 7), are attested in Asia, but some of these may well have originally been ethnic associations originally formed by immigrants from Egypt, if the founding of Sarapis sanctuary A on the island of Delos is typical ([RICIS 202/0101](#)).<sup>40</sup> Apuleius’ famous description of a procession in honor of Isis suggests the importance of groups of women in the worship of this goddess (*Metamorphoses*, book 11). However, as Sharon Kelly Heyob (1975, 81–110) warns, we should not exaggerate the role of women, for of the 1099 inscriptions in Ladislav Vidman’s catalogue (1969), for example, only 200 or 18.2% happen to mention women who were priestesses, members of associations, or devotees of the goddess. Most of the Isis or Sarapis associations attested in Asia

39 See *CMRD* I 16–17 (Rhodes), 34 and A3 (Collyda, near Saittai), 53–54 (Maionia, near Saittai), 57 (near Saittai), 87 (Sebaste), and 127 (Tymandos, near Phrygian Apollonia); Lane 1971–76, 3.109–113.

40 See *SIRIS* 285 (Heraklea-Latmos), 295 (= *ITrall* 86; II CE), 307 (= *IMagnSip* 15; II BCE and II CE), 314 (= *IPergamon* 338), 318–319 (Kyzikos; I CE), 324 (= *IKios* 22; I CE), 326 (= *IPrusaOlymp* 48; II CE); *IPrusaOlymp* 1028 = *SEG* 28 (1978), no. 1585. An association devoted to Anubis (*Synanubiastai*) is attested at Smyrna in the early III BCE (*SIRIS* 305 = *ISmyrna* 765). For sanctuaries and possible meeting-places of associations devoted to Isis or Sarapis see Wild 1984, esp. nos. 9, 12, 21, and 27.



Minor that list their membership consist principally of men (including those at Kyzikos, Magnesia by Sipylon, and Prusa). At Magnesia, at least one member was a Roman citizen, and the group at Prusa also included one Roman citizen among the six men who were gathered around their priest, Leon (two of them apparently relatives, perhaps brothers, of the priest).



*Figure 7: Bust of the Egyptian god Sarapis, now in the Vatican museum.*

Initiates devoted to Demeter (the Grain Mother) and Kore (the Maiden)—deities initially associated with the sanctuary at Eleusis, near Athens—were quite prevalent in some cities of western Asia Minor, especially at Ephesos, Smyrna, and Pergamon. Several inscriptions of the first and second centuries attest to an association devoted to Demeter Karpophoros (“Fruit-bringer”) in Ephesos or its vicinity (*IEph* 213 = *AGRW* 163; *IEph* 1595; *IEph* 4337 = *AGRW* 159). In the second century at Pergamon, there were initiates in the mysteries of the goddess as well as female hymn-singers, and there was at least one “company” (*speira*) which included women in its membership.<sup>41</sup> At Smyrna there was a group of initiates of Kore (*ISmyrna* 726) and a synod of initiates likely devoted to Demeter Thesmophoros (“Law-giver”; *ISmyrna* 653 = *AGRW* 188). Groups devoted to Demeter could consist of both men and women as leaders and members, and some groups were solely women. In terms of social status, it seems that they included at least some wealthy members in their number, especially as priests and priestesses, alongside the more general membership.<sup>42</sup>

By far the most well-attested associations devoted to the mysteries in Asia are those that honored Dionysos or Bacchus, so it is worth giving a bit more attention to them.<sup>43</sup> Setting aside guilds of Dionysiac performers at this point, we find unofficial associations in many cities and villages. A very important second century CE inscription from Magnesia on the Maeander relates a myth concerning the introduction of maenads (“frenzied” female followers of the god) and societies to that city (*IMagnMai* 215 = *AGRW* 202; see the fresco depicting a maenad in figure 8 and see the cover of this book). In the mid-third century BCE, so the story goes, a miraculous sign occurred as an image of Dionysos appeared after a tree was knocked down by a storm. The People of Magnesia sent messengers to consult the oracle at Delphi about the meaning of this sign. Apollo’s response was quite clear, calling on the People to dedicate temples to Dionysos and to “come onto Thebes’ holy ground, so that you may receive maenads . . . [who] will also give to you good rites and customs and will consecrate Bacchic societies (*thiasoi*) in the city.” This foundation story, which may have some truth to it, was still important to groups of initiates in the Roman era, which, unlike the associations in the story, included men in their ranks. An male initiate named Apollonios Mokolles set up this monument in the second century. In the early second century, a similar mixed group of initiates met in a “sacred house (*oikos*)” in the nearby district of Klindos (*IMagnMai* 117 = *AGRW* 203). This group consisted of both male and female leaders and members, including a chief-initiate, two men that are called “foster-father” (*appas*), a “nurse” (*hypotrophos*) of Dionysos, a “revealer of the holy objects,” and a priestess.

41 See Hepding 1910, 457–59, 476, nos. 40–42 (a female hymn-singer and a male initiate), 63 (the civic board of *thesmothetai* honors a male initiate); Ippel 1912, 286–87, 298–99, nos. 13 (Asklepiake sets up a monument for her own “company”), 16 (a male initiate and his daughter, a hymn-singer), 24 (the *thesmothetai* honor a priestess), 25 (a daughter honors her mother, a priestess of Demeter and Kore).

42 The wealthy Servilius family was prominent in the leadership of the Ephesian group in the early first century (*IEph* 4337), and another (probably wealthy) woman, Juliana from Magnesia, was the priestess around 38–42 CE (*IMagnMai* 158). A Roman citizen named Lucius Pompeius Apollonios was their advocate in the late first century (*IEph* 213). There appears to be a close link between Demeter and the meeting place of the presidents (*prytaneion*) at Ephesos (cf. *IEph* 10, 1058, 1060, 1067, 1070a, 1071), and at least one female president, Terentia Aeliane, was a benefactor of the association (see *IEph* 47.19, 720a, and 1595).

43 Cf. Nilsson 1957; Henrichs 1978; Cazanove 1986; Merkelbach 1988; Jaccottet 2003.





Figure 8: Relief of a maenad, now in the Naples Archaeological Museum.

A similar association of initiates apparently met outside the city-walls of Ephesos. During the reign of Hadrian, M. Antonius Drosos was their superintendent (*epimelētēs*) along with other leaders with Roman citizenship, one of whom, T. Claudius Romulus, was also one of the civic presidents (*prytaneis*; [IEph 275](#) = *AGRW* 168; [IEph 1601](#)). At Smyrna, there was a synod of initiates devoted to Dionysos Breseus. This group had its origins in the first century and even maintained some diplomatic contacts with emperors in the mid-second century ([ISmyrna 731](#) = *AGRW* 190;

*ISmyrna* 600 = *AGRW* 192; *ISmyrna* 639 = *AGRW* 193). A separate group devoted to Dionysos in Smyrna met under the leadership of a “revealer of the god” (*theophantēs*) in the second or early-third century. These initiates had a series of purity regulations—some perhaps reflecting the influence of Orphic dietary practices—concerning entrance into their sanctuary of Bromios (“Thunderer”; *ISmyrna* 728 = *AGRW* 195).

Dionysos Kathegemon (“the Leader”) held a prominent position at Pergamon and in cities most directly influenced by it (e.g. Philadelphia), so it is not a surprise to find abundant evidence for Dionysiac associations there.<sup>44</sup> The bacchic devotees who dedicated an altar to king Eumenes in the second century BCE find their successors in the “dancing cowherds” (*hoi choreusantes boukoloi*) of the Roman era (*IPergamonSupp* AM 27, 1902, no. 86 = *AGRW* 113; *IPergamon* 485 = *AGRW* 115; *IPergamonS* 4 = *AGRW* 116; *IPergamon* 486a–b).<sup>45</sup> The precise origin of this designation of male followers as herdsmen is not certain. In Euripides’ version of the myth (late-fifth century BCE), the shepherds and cowherds stand in awe of the maenads of Dionysos and are somewhat helpless when the ecstatic women begin to tear apart their herds (*Bacchae* 714–775). In light of this display of the great power of the god, one of the herdsmen (the messenger) urges the king to welcome Dionysos to Thebes (*Bacchae* 768). In Roman Asia Minor, the title is clearly used for those who said prayers, sang hymns, and danced in honor of Dionysos. Around the turn of the first century, the cowherds at Pergamon consisted primarily of men (though at least two women are mentioned as participants), some of them Roman citizens (up to 35% of membership).<sup>46</sup> Lucian of Samosata mentions that cowherds who performed Bacchic dances (in Ionia and Pontus) could include “men of the best birth and first rank,” as was the case with at least some at Pergamon though certainly not all (*On the Dance* 79 = *AGRW* L16; cf. Jones 1990). Since Philadelphia was a Pergamene foundation, it is not surprising to find there at least two associations devoted to Dionysos Kathegemon, one a “company” (*speira*) with a revealer of sacred objects and chief-cowherd as leaders and another the “initiates gathered around Dionysos Kathegemon” (Jaccottet 2003, vol. 2, no. 114; *ILydiaKP* I 42 = Jaccottet 2003, vol. 2, no. 113; II CE).

It is important to note that children were also participants within mysteries for Dionysos, which in some sense corresponds to the prominence of Dionysos’ childhood—with his foster-father, Silenos—in the myths. The famous fresco in the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii, for instance, gives a prominent place for a child, who is pictured reading (see figure 9). We know from several epitaphs—some from Asia Minor and others from Italy—that those as young as seven, ten, fifteen, or seventeen could “speak the rites of Dionysos” or “lead the society (*thiasos*) in dances.”<sup>47</sup>

44 Cf. Prott 1902; Ohlmutz 1968 [1940], 90–122.

45 Now see the study of the cowherds by Holger Schwarzer 2006.

46 Of the twenty-three members mentioned in *IPergamon* 485, five (21.7%) certainly possess Roman citizenship. Of the seventeen members legible in Conze and Schuchhardt 1899, 179–80 (no. 31), one is a woman and six (35.3%) possess Roman citizenship. In no. 32 (revision of *IPergamon* 486) only one name is legible, a woman. One cowherd, L. Aninius Flaccus, also belonged to the hymn-singers’ association which sang hymns in honor of the emperors.

47 See *TAM* V 477 (Saittai); *IApamBith* 103 (Pylai); *CIG* 400 (Iconium); *IGUR* 1169, 1228 (Rome); Merkelbach 1971 (Tusculum). Cf. Cole 1993, 288–91.



*Figure 9: Section from the fresco at the Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, depicting a reading child.*

As this brief survey of evidence shows, there was a variety of possibilities in the gender and social makeup of Dionysiac groups in Asia Minor. Some consisted solely of women, especially groups of maenads. Others in the later Hellenistic and Roman eras began to include a mixture of both men and women or, in some cases, solely men (e.g. the Iobacchoi at Athens). M. P. Nilsson's (1957) overall characterization of Dionysiac associations as consisting primarily of the wealthy (based on evidence from Italy and the Iobacchoi at Athens) is somewhat misleading, at least for Asia Minor. Dionysiac associations of varying economic means could count on benefactions from the wealthy for the construction, modification, or decoration of their meeting-places or for other provisions for activities. The presence of wealth or influential members does not necessarily exclude a range of socioeconomic standing among other members of these associations.

Similar diversity in composition is evident in the case of associations in Asia Minor that were devoted to the Israelite or Judean God. The social and gender makeup of associations of Judeans could vary from one city to the next and even among synagogues at a particular locale, as we saw in the earlier discussion of ethnic associations. Yet another phenomenon that deserves discussion here is associations that consisted principally of non-Judeans (called "gentiles" here for convenience) who adopted at least some Judean practices and who worshiped the Judean God in some way. This is a topic that is sometimes discussed in connection with the so-called "god-fearers" (as they are

called in Acts), those gentiles who, to varying degrees, were attracted to the Judean God or the synagogue and who could potentially become converts (proselytes; cf. Cohen 1989). There are indications in literature (besides Acts) that at least some gentiles as early as the first century adopted practices associated with the Judean God, especially observance of the Sabbath (cf. Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.282, who is nonetheless exaggerating the point in this apologetic context). Evidence of associations of this sort does not necessarily imply Judean “missionizing” in any way.

Since writing the first edition of this work, I have become more hesitant about the identification of the Sabbatists (*Sabbatistai*) in Cilicia (*LSAM* 80 = *AGRW* 213) and devotees of the “Highest god” (Theos Hypsistos) on the northern coast of the Black Sea as instances of gentile associations devoted to the Judean god, although the possibility does remain.<sup>48</sup> There are, of course, clearer cases than these. Christian congregations in Asia were devoted to the Judean God, some of them consisting principally of non-Judeans (cf. 1 Peter 1:14–19; 4:3–4; Eph 2:11–12), and others including a mixture of both gentiles and Judeans. Christian literature pertinent to the province of Asia attests to such groups in cities (and perhaps villages) including Ephesos, Magnesia on the Maeander, Pergamon, Philadelphia, Sardis, Smyrna, Thyatira, Tralles, and the cities of the Lycos valley: Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea. There was considerable diversity among congregations of this region in the first two centuries, including Johannine, Pauline, Montanist, Marcionite, docetic or proto-gnostic, and other forms of Christianity.

Until recent years, it was quite common for scholars to speak of early Christianity as, in the words of Adolf Deissmann (1995 [1908], 8–9), “a movement of the lower classes.” Although Deissmann may have been more nuanced in his understanding of “the lower classes” than others have been,<sup>49</sup> the notion that most, if not all, groups of Jesus-followers drew their membership primarily from the *poorest* segments of society has come to influence some recent studies of Christian literature relevant to Asia. John H. Elliott’s study of 1 Peter, for example, assumes that the “vast majority” of its recipients were literally “aliens” from the “working proletariat of the urban and rural areas” of Asia Minor (Elliott 1990 [1981], 59–100, esp. 70–72). He goes on to portray the social situation of this “proletariat,” “the ignorant and exploited masses,” in harsh terms, citing a study by Samuel Dickey (1928). A corollary of these harsh socioeconomic circumstances and experiences of deprivation, Elliott suggests, was a milieu most conducive to the success of a sectarian movement with an apocalyptic message. Such an understanding of Christian groups generally, as well as the nature of conditions in Asia Minor under Roman rule, is problematic.

Recent years have seen a shift away from this sort of characterization towards an acknowledgment that the congregations were “more nearly a cross section of society than we have sometimes thought,” as Floyd V. Filson (1939, 111) observed long ago. Studies by Abraham J.

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48 See the first edition with notes and now my more extensive comments in *Greco-Roman Associations*, volume 2. The new edition of Schürer confidently states that “there seems to be little doubt that the term [Sabbatists] denotes those who observe the Sabbath” (Schürer 1973, 3.161 n.50). For scholars who are more confident in finding devotees of the Judean God in the Bosporan kingdom, see Levinskaya 1996, 83–116, 242–46 (building on Schürer 1897) and Mitchell 1999, 116–17. For a different view, see Ustinova 1991, 1999.

49 Although perhaps taking things too far in the other direction, Friesen (2004) correctly makes the point that Deissmann’s use of the term “the lower classes” did not necessarily reject some socioeconomic diversity within this segment of society.

Malherbe, Meeks, and others emphasize that, although we lack sufficient information to provide detailed profiles of the social level of Christians, there are indications that many groups reflected a mixture of socioeconomic levels.<sup>50</sup> Within this mixture, Meeks (1983, 73) suggests that the “typical Christian” was a “free artisan or trader,” though, as I said earlier, there was certainly a range of possibilities in wealth and status within such segments of society.

Evidence for groups of Jesus-followers in Asia Minor specifically also reflects a cross-section of society. The Christ-devotees brought before Pliny the Younger (Roman governor of Bithynia-Pontus), represented “individuals of every age and class, both men and women,” among them some Roman citizens and two female deaconesses (*Epistles* 10.96.4, 8-9 = *AGRW* L40). In a more general sense, the inclusion of household codes giving advice to both masters and slaves in 1 Peter, the Pastoral epistles, and Ignatius’ epistles implies that some of each were present in the groups addressed, and it was only those with a surplus in income who would be purchasing slaves. The Pastoral epistles’ guidelines on the selection of leaders reflects the presence of some persons of considerable wealth, and the epistles of Ignatius and of John likewise mention wealthier persons, such as Diotrephes and Polycarp, who assumed leadership within congregations (see Maier 1991, 155-56; *Mart.Poly.* 5.1, 6.1-2; *Ign. Pol.* 4.3).

Having made these generalizations regarding composition, we must remain aware of the possibilities of differences in the makeup of groups of Jesus-followers from one city to the next in the same region or even from one group to another in a particular locality. While the congregation at Smyrna in the late-first century may have drawn the greater part of its membership from those of limited financial means, for instance, those in nearby Laodicea appear to include some with considerable wealth, probably gained through trade (Rev 2:9; 3:17). I have already noted the probability that some congregations might be better described as more homogeneous, occupational guilds, drawing membership from a similar socioeconomic level and gender (as at Thessalonica), while others might rest on household connections, reflecting the social spectrum associated with that social structure.

## Conclusion

Many unofficial associations in Asia Minor drew their membership primarily from among the non-elite population, rather than from the upper strata which could boast of senatorial or equestrian rank or of holding the most important civic positions (though there were certainly some elite associations such as the “Arval Brothers” at Rome). The civic and imperial elites were important for associations primarily as benefactors or leaders, even though there were some that did act as leaders or cultic functionaries within associations. Furthermore, we must also beware of imagining that non-elite segments of the *urban* population were homogeneous, that they were predominantly poor and deprived, for instance. Instead, there was a range in levels of wealth and social status within these strata of society, and the membership of many associations reflects this range.

By considering associations in terms of the principal social networks which informed their

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50 Cf. Judge 1960; Malherbe 1983 [1977], 29-59; Theissen 1982; Meeks 1983, 51-73; Lampe 1989 [1987]; Holmberg 1990, 21-76.



membership, here identifying five sources, a clearer picture emerges with respect to variations in the socioeconomic composition of these groups. An association deriving from social networks of the household could reflect the spectrum of dependents associated with familial structures, both men and women of free, freed, and servile origins. While some ethnic or immigrant groups could consist solely of men (sometimes of a common profession), others included both men and women in their number as members or leaders. Neighborhood associations could consist of a mixture of occupations, depending on the locale in question. On the one hand, many occupational associations could be somewhat homogeneous, consisting of men of a common level of wealth and status. On the other, there were cases when a particular guild reflected a social spectrum with respect to citizenship, wealth, legal standing, and status overall.

Variety, rather than uniformity, is also the case with those groups that appear to have emerged from social connections associated with frequenting a place (sanctuary, shrine or other holy place) where a particular deity or deities were honored. While an association devoted to the god Men in a village of Lydia might include both men and women of modest means in its number, another devoted to Dionysos or Sarapis elsewhere might include a member or leader wealthy enough to pay for a new mosaic, perhaps also a Roman citizen or civic functionary. Judean synagogues and Christian assemblies, too, could differ in composition from one locality to another, some reflecting the social spectrum of urban society more fully than others.

Here I have focused primarily on cities in western Asia Minor (the Roman province of Asia), but it is worth briefly noting that other recent studies of the composition of associations elsewhere in the empire come to similar conclusions, despite regional variations. In studying associations (*collegia*) in the West, Frank M. Ausbüttel (1982, 34–48) challenges the common portrait of these groups as consisting of only the poorest in society. Instead, he shows, “the composition of the *collegia* was just as heterogeneous as that of the plebeians [i.e. non-elite classes],” closely reflecting the social profile of the population in towns generally.<sup>51</sup> The social stratification of society and of associations will be of continuing relevance when I turn to the involvements of associations in imperial and other aspects of civic life. But first, the purposes and activities of associations deserve further attention.

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51 Ausbüttel 1982, 37 (trans. mine): “Die Zusammensetzung der *collegia* war genauso heterogen wie die der *plebs*.” Cf. Kampen 1981, 31.



## 2 / PURPOSES: HONORING THE GODS, FEASTING WITH FRIENDS

### Introduction

The typology provided in the previous chapter sets the stage for a re-evaluation of the purposes that associations served. There has been a tendency among some scholars to downplay the “religious” purposes of many groups. Moreover, as I argue here, all types of associations served a variety of interdependent social, cultic, and funerary functions for their members. The evidence strongly suggests the importance of honoring gods and goddesses within associations of all types. Overall, these interconnected functions helped to provide members with a sense of belonging and identity.

The present chapter does not attempt to provide a comprehensive discussion of all activities. Nor does it claim that all associations served the same purposes in precisely the same way. Instead, acknowledging variety, I give a broad overview of the internal life of such groups so that we cannot be misled into believing that imperial dimensions of group-life (part two) stood in isolation or that they were the only important aspect of group-life. In fact, subsequent chapters show how imperial aspects were embedded within both the internal life and the external relations of associations. In this sense, the portrait of associations here, together with the following chapter on the civic environment, provides an essential framework within which we can begin to understand the place of such groups within society in Roman Asia Minor.

The discussion here also begins to sketch out, in broad strokes, similarities between the general functions of associations—social, ritual, funerary—and those of both Judean synagogues and Christian assemblies. It was for this reason, in part, that both synagogues and assemblies could be described by ancient observers (including certain Judeans and Jesus-followers) in terms drawn from the life of associations, despite the peculiarity of honoring only one God (“monotheism”) in a context where the existence of many gods (“polytheism”) was taken for granted.

### Visualizing Association-Life

Monuments from north-western Asia Minor capture in visual form the central thesis of this chapter concerning the interconnected purposes of associations.<sup>1</sup> These reliefs depict something we rarely encounter in surviving evidence: an actual picture of the activities of associations and related scenes which may communicate to us something of how these groups understood themselves, or at least of how the artisans who designed the monuments pictured the activities of associations. The men and women belonging to a society (*thiasos*) in Triglia (west of Apamea in Bithynia) honored Stratonike, a priestess of Mother Cybele, by setting up the monument in the “synagogue of Zeus” (*IApamBith* 35 [119 or 104 BCE]; see figure 10).<sup>2</sup> The relief consists of three parts which reveal the

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1 For a discussion of Mysian and Bithynian reliefs with banquet scenes, see: Mitropoulou 1990; Mitropoulou 1996; Straten 1993.

2 For other publications of the inscription see: Perdrizet 1899, 593, no. 2 = Robert 1949a, 42, no. 1 = CCCA I 252 = Pfuhl and Möbius 1977, vol. 2, Tafel 332 (with photo).



inter-related purposes of the association and the importance of the gods within the group. At the top are depicted in a preeminent manner the deities to whom this association granted particularly appropriate honors. On the same plane, the priestess Stratonike is pictured approaching an altar with upraised hands in adoration of both Apollo (who stands beside the altar) and Cybele (who remains seated to the right). This priestess is accompanied by a girl playing a double-flute and a boy bringing a sheep for sacrifice. Under the beneficent protection of the gods the monument pictures, on a smaller scale, ten members of the association reclining to share in a banquet, consuming food and drink while they are entertained by pipers, seen on the left (cf. [IMT 1980](#)). Beside the musicians is a youth carrying a basket towards two others who are managing the mixing bowls for the wine as some souvlaki roasts to the far right.



*Figure 10: Relief of the priestess Stratonike approaching Cybele and Apollo with a banqueting scene, from Triglia (IApamBith 35).*

A second monument erected by a society in Triglia similarly depicts a sacrificial scene, but without the members at meal (*IApamBith 33* [123 or 108 BCE]; see figure 11). On this relief, Zeus is pictured holding a libation bowl over an altar on the right as a member of the society and a child bring forward a sacrificial offering. The inscription reads: “The society-members (*thiasitai*) crowned for life Asklepiades son of Melidoros, who was priest in a good and worthy manner in the 174th year, with a monument and a crown of flowers with a ribbon.”

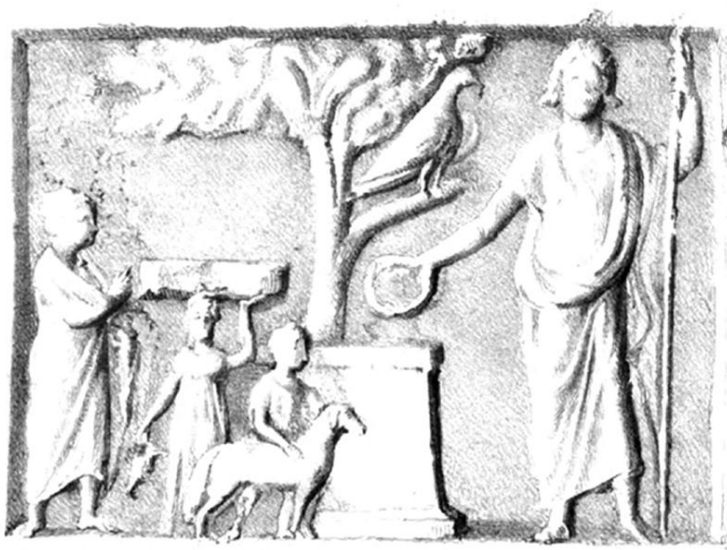


Figure 11: Relief of Asklepiades approaching Zeus (*IApamBith 33*).

Thirdly, a three-level relief from Parnormos near Kyzikos, which does not necessarily involve an association, similarly depicts in larger than life scale the gods Zeus, Artemis, and Apollo at the top. Six reclining banqueters are pictured below in the second panel, and the bottom panel shows a musician playing the double-flute, a nude female dancing, a nude dancing figure with a Phrygian cap and percussion instruments, and a man serving from a wine bowl (*GIBM IV 1007*; figure 12). These scenes are not unlike what we might imagine taking place within guilds and associations, for whom sacrifice (“religious life”) and the accompanying meal (“social life”) were intimately intertwined.

### Questioning a Tradition in Scholarship

This picture of associations eating and drinking as they gather together under the protection or even in the presence of the deities whom they honor is further confirmed by archaeological and epigraphic evidence. One scholarly tradition, which is apparent in the works of M. P. Nilsson, Ramsay MacMullen and Nicholas R. E. Fisher, tends to separate the “social” from the “religious” in arguing that most associations were primarily concerned with conviviality and other social concerns, in some sense lacking genuinely “religious” dimensions. Similar views are evident among scholars who have considered imperial cults—rituals in honor of the emperors—in the past.



*Figure 12: Relief of Zeus, Artemis and Apollo with a banqueting scene, from Panormos (GIBM IV 1007).*

The gatherings of almost all associations in the Roman era are more an excuse to have a party than they are a genuine attempt to honor gods, according to Nilsson (1957, 64): “the Dionysiac mystery associations resemble the other very numerous associations of the Hellenistic and following age, which, under the pretext of honoring some god after whom the association was named, assembled in order to enjoy themselves and to feast.” For Nilsson, many mysteries performed by groups in the Roman era, including those associated with imperial cults, were merely “pseudo-mysteries.”<sup>3</sup> Nilsson is right to compare groups devoted to Dionysos with other associations in that all of them certainly included conviviality among their purposes, but his tendency to downplay the significance of honoring the gods is unfounded. Further on, in connection with his upper-class characterization of most Dionysiac associations, Nilsson’s value judgements become even clearer: “These people were not in earnest about religion” (Nilsson 1957, 147). Scholars such as Nilsson do not fully consider that in antiquity even social aspects of life, such as banquets, could be infused with cultic significance for those who participated. We need not agree with such a view wherein enjoyment of participants is viewed as a tell-tale sign that they were not interested in genuinely honoring deities.

Although more balanced in his views, it is more than a coincidence that MacMullen’s book on *Roman Social Relations* (1974a) discusses guilds extensively while his book on *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (1981) gives far less attention to them. In the former he discusses the purposes of occupational associations, including their civic role. But he stresses that it was their social function above all else—“pure comradeship” and feasting—that were important: “if piety counted for much, conviviality counted for more” (MacMullen 1974a, 71–87, esp. pp. 77, 80). It is only when he turns to what he labels “cult associations” and groups of foreigners that he considers the gods to be a significant factor within group activities. Yet even his discussion of associations devoted to Mithras (in the book from 1981) is revealing of these tendencies to downplay cultic dimensions of group-life. MacMullen emphasizes the down-to-earth aspects of feasting and friendship as the main objectives of such groups to the neglect of the cosmological significance of their communal meals. He does not deal with the material evidence that suggests that these meals could replicate “in the life of the Mithraic community something originally enacted on the divine plane by the cult’s gods,” as Roger Beck (1992, 4–5) demonstrates. A similar tradition of scholarship to that of Nilsson and MacMullen is echoed in Fisher’s (1988b, 1222–23) statement that “although the *collegia* had religious functions, they were above all concerned with status, solidarity, sociability, and aspects of social security.”

These scholars are correct in acknowledging the social side of the associations. But their corresponding neglect of the importance of the gods and rituals for them, which were often intertwined with what we might call “social,” is problematic. Often it seems that such scholars are working with an unstated definition of religion which distinguishes it rather sharply from feasting and other aspects of life. Modern, western definitions of religion along the lines of those offered by William James (1963 [1902]) and Rudolf Otto (1923) focus on the feelings and personal experiences

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3 Nilsson stresses that a Dionysiac group at Smyrna (*ISmyrna* 728) was an exception in maintaining the truly “sacral” character of its meals and activities. The prescriptions in this inscription, he asserts, were designed to combat the widespread “desacralization” of the Dionysiac mysteries which he otherwise assumes (Nilsson 1957, 133–43, esp. 135, 139).

of the individual in relation to the divine as the most important indicators of “genuine” or “true” religion. Some scholars have approached the study of antiquity with similar, problematic conceptions. Within this framework, religion is more concerned with solemnity, asceticism, and mysticism, rather than conviviality and enjoyment, and the focus is on the individual rather than the group or community, on feelings and attitudes rather than activities and rituals.

The present study takes a more open-ended and cross-culturally sensitive approach to the subject. We need to realize that in employing terms such as “religious” and “religion” we are dealing with abstractions that allow us to conceptualize our subject. We are not dealing with objective realities which the groups and persons we are studying would necessarily isolate from other aspects of life. The modern compartmentalization of life into the political, economic, social, and religious would not be recognizable to people in the ancient context, where honoring deities was very much embedded within the daily life of individuals, whose identities were inextricably bound up within social groupings or communities. Within the ancient Mediterranean, we are dealing with a world view and way of life centered on the maintenance of fitting relations among human groups, benefactors, and deities within the webs of connections which constituted society and the cosmos. Cultic life in antiquity had to do with appropriately honoring gods and goddesses through rituals of various kinds, especially sacrificial offerings, in ways that ensured the safety and protection of human groups and their members. Moreover, the forms which such honors could take do not necessarily coincide with modern or western preconceptions of what being “religious” means.

### **Intertwined Social, Cultic, and Funerary Activities**

This understanding of Greco-Roman culture—encompassing notions of the gods and honors for them—will become clearer as we proceed throughout this study. As I argue here, associations served interconnected social, cultic, and funerary purposes for their members.<sup>4</sup> There is no reason to question the genuineness of their “religious” dimensions in the sense that appropriately honoring deities was a real concern of virtually all types of groups and their members.

#### ***1. Honoring Deities***

We have already encountered gods and goddesses—and honors for them—in the discussion of numerous types of associations. The household association at Philadelphia performed purifications and mysteries in honor of Zeus, Agdistis, and other deities. Phrygians living at Pompeii honored the Great Mother, and groups of immigrants from Asia Minor living in Moesia and Macedonia often chose Dionysos as patron. The Roman businessmen settled at Assos were engaging in typical activities for such groups when they dedicated monuments both to god Augustus’ wife, Livia, the “new Hera” (*IAssos* 19), and to the goddess Roma, “the benefactor of the cosmos” (*IAssos* 20; early-1 CE). So was the neighborhood association at Prusias who dedicated monuments to Savior Zeus (*IPrusiasHyp* 63-64).

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4 Now see also Matthew Gibb’s (2011) study of the purposes of associations in Egypt.

Epigraphic evidence, by its very nature, limits the degree to which we should even expect to find rituals and honors for the gods regularly revealed to us in any detail, if mentioned at all (with the exception of cult regulations, of course). Many inscriptions rarely state what was taken for granted as customary practice. Most monuments pertaining to associations are gravestones (epitaphs) or honorary inscriptions for benefactors (including deities), not cultic guidelines or prescriptions for group life. Nonetheless, it seems that most, if not all, associations chose particular deities as patrons and included rituals in honor of gods or goddesses among their regular activities. Quite often it is not possible to measure the degree to which honors for deities were important for a particular group in comparison with other groups. What is clear is that such practices were significant to virtually all associations. I begin with occupational associations since scholars such as MacMullen tend to downplay the importance of the gods within these groups.

The dream books of Artemidoros of Daldis (who resided in Ephesos in the second century) supply the social historian with indispensable information regarding daily life, especially revealing the significance of goddesses or gods for members of guilds.<sup>5</sup> It is significant that throughout his guide-book on interpreting dreams he so frequently associates workers and craftsmen with the deities whom they worshiped (esp. *Dream Interpretations* 2.33–44). He states the following with respect to artisans who appear in dreams: “People who have professions that are associated with particular gods signify the gods who are the patrons of the professions in question” (2.44; trans. by White 1975). It was common knowledge—not only to Artemidoros but also to the social spectrum of persons for whom his dream interpretations were supposed to work—that those of a common occupation frequently devoted themselves to honoring particular deities.

Yet even for artisans themselves, Artemidoros states, “it is more auspicious to see gods who are compatible with the professions of the dreamers than to see gods who are incompatible. For gods who do not assist men in their work are inauspicious” (4.74). This and other common sense (at least to Artemidoros) statements are particularly significant since, especially in this case, he is actually revealing what he perceives to be the self-understanding of the artisans themselves (i.e. artisans are the dreamers). The gods were a regular part of the landscape of the populace’s dream life as well as waking life, and for workers of many trades appropriately honoring the gods was important. The silversmiths of Ephesos who, according to the author of Acts (19:23–41), gathered together a crowd of craftsmen and others in defence of the reputation of Artemis, patron deity of their hometown, would not be exceptional in this regard: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!,” they shouted.

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5 On the use of Artemidoros’ work for social history, see Pomeroy 1991.



Sometimes we catch glimpses of these concerns to honor the gods working themselves out in the corporate lives of occupational associations in Asia Minor and elsewhere, despite the limitations of archaeological evidence. Imogen Dittmann-Schöne's recent work likewise points to the place of the gods within guilds of workers involved in metal-working, fishing, gardening, and trade in Asia Minor.<sup>6</sup> Cases of guilds honoring the gods by dedicating altars or other monuments are numerous. In the Aezeanatis valley, for instance, two men dedicated a column to Zeus Bennios on behalf of a guild of farmers devoted to the Mother goddess Steuene (*MAMA IX 49*) and another guild dedicated a monument to Mother Kouaene (*MAMA IX 66*). Leather-workers on the island of Lesbos dedicated a statue of Aphrodite (*IG XII,2 109* = *AGRW 259*). Similarly, a guild of silversmiths and goldsmiths at Smyrna restored a statue of Athena for the homeland (*ISmyrna 721* = *AGRW 186*; 14–37 CE). There were also cases when guilds expressed their piety by honoring a priest or other functionary of a god, as was the case with both the fleet (*stolos*) of fishermen and the guild (*station*) of gardeners that honored Ulpius Karpos of Miletos, who was prophet and priest of “the most holy and most high god” (*OGIS 755, 756* = *AGRW 182a-b*; 140s CE).



*Figure 13: Meeting-hall of the grain-measurers at Ostia.*

<sup>6</sup> Dittmann-Schöne 2000, 94–108 = Dittmann-Schöne 2002.

Building remains also clearly communicate the importance of deities in the activities of occupational associations.<sup>7</sup> Though we lack excavated guild-halls in Asia specifically, several halls (*scholae*) used by guilds of builders, shippers, ship-builders, grain-measurers and others have been excavated at Ostia (a port city of Rome) in Italy. Both Russell Meiggs (1960, 324–330) and Gustav Hermansen (1981, 55–89) suggest that the remains of these buildings, which often included both sanctuaries and banqueting facilities, disclose the intertwined purposes of the guilds. Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser’s recent work (2002) analyzes three of these guild-halls at Ostia with conceptions of space in mind and shows the place of honoring the gods within these buildings, although he does maintain a problematic distinction between occupational associations and “religious” associations. The building of the grain-measurers’ guild included a general meeting room, a courtyard with a well, a latrine, and a temple dedicated to the patron deity, Ceres Augusta (see the photo of the main meeting room in figure 13; II–III CE). The meeting-hall was decorated with a mosaic floor that proudly depicts members of the guild engaging in their profession (see figure 14).



Figure 14: Mosaic of a grain-measurer from the meeting-hall at Ostia.

<sup>7</sup> On the meeting-places of associations, now see Beate Bollmann 1998. However, Bollmann still tends towards problematic categories and, like MacMullen and others, asserts that associations were more concerned with “social” than with “religious” functions.





Figure 15: Banqueting room (*triclinium*) in the builders' meeting-place at Ostia.

Built in the time of Hadrian, the builders' meeting-place at Ostia consisted of a central courtyard surrounded by several rooms on all sides. Most conspicuous was the central room encountered immediately on entering the building, which was the sanctuary where rituals were performed regularly in honor of the guild's patron deities. In the south-western corner was the kitchen and four other rooms on the east were dining-rooms with built in couches (*triclinia*) for reclining to eat (see figure 15).

The meeting-place of an occupational association on the Greek island of Delos in an earlier era will also illustrate the importance of cultic purposes for such guilds. The buildings of associations of various types have been excavated on Delos, including those of the comedian actors, the Israelites (Samaritans), the Judeans and the devotees of Sarapis.<sup>8</sup> There is also inscriptional evidence for many other associations of immigrants on the island, including the Tyrian merchants and shippers devoted to Herakles, who was likely identified with the Tyrian god Melqart (*IDelos* 1519 = *AGRW* 223), and there were numerous groups of Italian or Roman merchants. The group which concerns us here is an association that drew its membership from social networks arising from common ethnic identity and, secondarily, common occupation: the Poseidoniasts from Berytos in Phoenicia, consisting of a mixture of merchants, shippers, and traders (*to koinon berytiōn Poseidōniastōn emporōn kai nauklērōn kai egdocheōn*).<sup>9</sup> This guild met in a residential style building that had been constructed or adapted sometime before 152 BCE and was used by the guild until the building's destruction in 69 BCE.

<sup>8</sup> See Bruneau 1983, 179–185, 206–208, building nos. 76 and 80; Bruneau 1982; White 1997, 1.37–40, 2.332–42, nos. 70–71. Cf. Rauh 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *IDelos* 1520, 1772–1796; Bruneau 1983, 174–79, no. 57.



*Figure 16: Statue group of Aphrodite and Pan from the meeting-place of the Berytians at Delos.*

The concern to honor gods and goddesses alongside other activities is clearly communicated by the remains that have been unearthed. The building consisted of a large courtyard in the style of a household (F), which the guild dedicated to “the ancestral gods” of the homeland (*theois patriois*; *IDelos* 1774; see figure 16). Statues and other honorary monuments for benefactors and deities were placed within this courtyard. A well-preserved statue of Aphrodite and Pan (god of the wild, half man and half goat) was also found within the building (see figure 17). Another courtyard (E) may have been used for commercial activities, and there were several other smaller rooms, some of which were probably used for storage (G–T). One of these rooms (G) may have been used for banquets. An honorary inscription erected by the guild for a Roman benefactor and banker, Marcus Minatius, happens to describe one of the guild’s festivals in honor of Poseidon (*IDelos* 1520 = *AGRW* 224). This festal gathering under the leadership of the chief of the society (*archithiasitēs*) involved a sacrificial procession, offering of an ox, and accompanying meals.

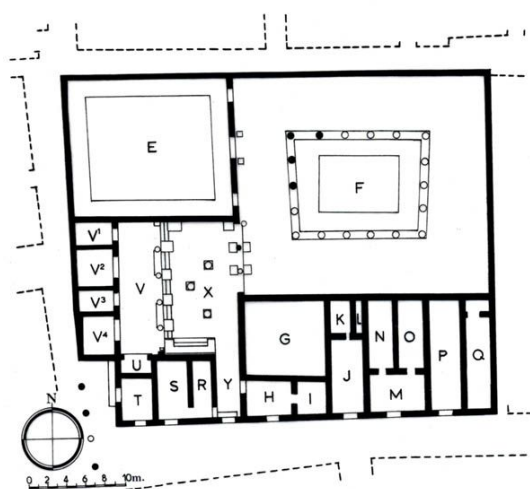


Figure 17: Plan of the meeting-place of the Berytians at Delos.

The meeting-place also had a sanctuary area in the south-western section, which consisted of a foyer (pronaos V) along with several shrines.<sup>10</sup> Although there is some debate concerning their building-history, there were at least three (perhaps four) shrines. By the early first century (88 BCE at the latest) one of these shrines (V<sup>1</sup>) contained a statue with an inscribed base for Roma, the guild’s “benefactor” (*IDelos* 1778 = *AGRW* 226). Another shrine (V<sup>2</sup>) was devoted to the patron deity, Poseidon (*IDelos* 2325). A third (and perhaps fourth) was likely dedicated to the other “ancestral gods” so often mentioned in the inscriptions, probably including Astarte and perhaps Herakles-Melqart.<sup>11</sup> Here the members of the guild could regularly honor the deities who

protected them on a daily basis, ensured their success in business, and contributed to the well-being of their distant homeland. We can imagine similar rituals in honor of the gods taking place within other occupational and ethnic associations about whom we happen to know far less.

Returning to guilds in the Roman province of Asia, there are momentary glimpses into common, ongoing internal practices in honor of gods and goddesses. So on one epitaph from Teira, near Ephesos, a grain-measurer (*prometrēs*) by profession makes provisions for a guild of workers (*ergatai*) to hold a yearly wine-banquet in connection with celebrations in honor of Poseidon, apparently their patron deity (*IEph* 3216). The well-attested “sanhedrin” (*synedrion*) of physicians at Ephesos incidentally reveals in only one of its surviving inscriptions what was central to its ongoing internal life—namely, sacrifice and accompanying feasts—in referring to itself as the “physicians who sacrifice to ancestor Asklepios and to the revered ones (*Sebastoi*),” members of the

10 Cf. Picard 1920; Bruneau 1978; Meyer 1988; Bruneau 1991.

11 Cf. *IDelos* 1774, 1776, 1781, 1783, 1785, 1789.

imperial family as gods (*IEph* 719 = *AGRW* 165; early II CE).

The importance of the gods can be assumed for other occupational associations as well. An association of fishermen at Kyzikos dedicated a monument to Poseidon and Aphrodite Pontia with a relief depicting a sacrificial scene so familiar to them in their group-life (*IMT* 1539; I BCE). There were two altars in a special shrine dedicated to the “Great Gods” of Samothrace in the fishery toll-office at Ephesos (*IEph* 20 = *AGRW* 162, lines 70–71; 54–59 CE). These divine protectors of those at sea were evidently the patron deities of the fishermen and fish-dealers who made donations to build the structure; some members may well have been initiates in the mysteries of these gods. When a guild of builders had doubts about whether they should engage in certain construction work on the theater at Miletos, they turned to the god Apollo at Didyma for advice (*IMilet* 935 = *AGRW* 179; ca. 120 CE):

Should the builders (*oikodomoí*) associated with . . . Epigonos — that is, the contractors for the section of the theater in which the prophet of the god, the late Ulpianus, was superintendent of works and the architect, Menophilos, assigns the work – fashion and construct the arches and the vaults over the columns or should they consider other work? The god answered: For good uses of wise building techniques, it is expedient to consult a skillful man for the best suggestions, performing sacrifices to thrice-born Pallas (i.e. the goddess Athena) and strong Herakles.

Apollo’s rather vague response regarding their architectural work (suggesting that they consult an expert) is accompanied by a very clear prescription that these craftsmen perform sacrifices to Athena and Herakles and continue working.<sup>12</sup> Offerings of sacrificial victims, other foods, and libations with accompanying banquets were the touchstone of corporate piety in the Greco-Roman world and we can assume that they were a regular part of the lives of most associations.

Regular festivals, sacrifices, and other rituals in honor of the gods were a common feature in other types of associations beyond the guilds. Some groups engaged in mysteries, for instance. As Walter Burkert (1987) emphasizes, mysteries were not a separate religion to be defined over against the cultic life of the city. Rather, mysteries could be incorporated within various settings, including associations. Mysteries were integral for entry into some groups, especially those devoted to Dionysos, Demeter and Kore, Isis and Sarapis or others who called themselves “initiates” (*mystai*). Partially because of the element of secrecy, very little is known concerning these rites, but these rituals often involved the revelation of the deity or of sacred objects. Numerous inscriptions pertaining to Dionysiac associations attest to the functionary responsible for revealing the sacred objects, the hierophant: see, for instance, *Jaccottet*, vol. 2, no. 114, from Philadelphia; *IPergamonSupp* AM 37, 1912, Nr. 13; *TAM* V 744, from Julia Gordos; *SEG* 28 (1978), no. 1187, from Nakoleia; *SEG* 41 (1991), no. 1202 = *AGRW* 148, from Hierapolis; *IEph* 275 = *AGRW* 168; and, *IMagnMai* 117 = *AGRW* 203.

For other groups, such as the association meeting in the house of Dionysios at Philadelphia, certain states of purity could be required before participating in ritual activities. In this case members were not to deceive one another or use contraceptives fatal to children, and the statutes

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12 W. H. Buckler (1923, 34–36, no. 3) may be going to far in calling this a “strike” though (cf. Ste. Croix 1981, 273; MacMullen 1966, 176).



also outline some guidelines as to acceptable sexual relations. The list of requirements concludes with a call for obedience to the gods, stating that the “gods will be merciful to those who obey and will always give them all good things, whatever things gods give to people whom they love. But if any transgress, the gods will hate such people and inflict upon them great punishments.” (*LSAM* 20 = *AGRW* 121, lines 46–51; cf. Barton and Horsley 1981). The Christ-devotees brought before Pliny in Pontus apparently had similar expectations for those participating in their rituals: they “bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery, and adultery, to commit no breach of trust and not to deny a deposit when called upon to restore it” (*Epistles* 10.96.7 [LCL]).

Appropriately honoring the gods by way of rituals was taken very seriously by both individuals and groups. In one of the so-called “confession inscriptions” (*Beichtinschriften*) of Asia Minor, a man from Blaundos (east of Philadelphia) lamentingly tells of frequent and enduring punishment from the god “because, although he had been called, he did not want to come and be present at the mysteries” (*MAMA IV* 281; I–II CE). Although not widely attested, there are a few cases that I explore elsewhere (Harland 2009, 159–160) in which some degree of exclusivity accompanied participation in certain rites, as with the servants (therapeutists) of Zeus at Sardis who were “not to participate in the mysteries of Sabazios . . . and of Agdistis and Ma” (*Herrmann* 1996, 329–335 [no. 4] = *AGRW* 126; II CE).

Other practices associated with the gods were ongoing features of life within associations. Myths or stories about deities could be an important component within rituals. At Smyrna, for instance, the initiates of Dionysos Bromios (“Thunderer”) included among their activities an exposition of the story of the Titans (who in some versions of mythology tore apart the child Dionysos), probably done by the functionary called the revealer of the god (*theophantēs*; *ISmyrna* 728 = *AGRW* 195; II–III CE). Initiates at the same locale thanked two female “theologians” (*theologoi*) who gave expositions or recited hymns on the greatness of the goddesses in question (*ISmyrna* 653, 654; I–II CE; cf. *ISmyrna* 697 = *AGRW* 194). A theologian is also attested among the hymn-singers of god Augustus at Pergamon (*IPergamon* 374 = *AGRW* 117). Among the activities of the Bacchic devotees (*Iobacchoi*) at Athens was the priest’s “discourse about the god (*theologia*)” (*IG II<sup>2</sup>* 1368 = *AGRW* 7). This same group also engaged in some sort of sacred drama in which members were assigned roles as Dionysos (the patron deity), Kore, Aphrodite, and others, re-enacting stories of the gods (esp. lines 44–46, 64–67, 121–27). Here we are dealing with more than simply a group of “drinking-buddies” (*Zechkumpane*), as Engelbert Drerup (1899, 357) misleadingly calls them.

Prayers, singing, music and dancing were also among the means by which the membership in associations fittingly honored deities. Communities, groups, and individuals sought concrete favors, guidance or protection from goddesses through prayers or by making vows. An association that met in a sanctuary of Zeus at Philadelphia in Egypt, for instance, regularly included in its practices a prayer, along with libations and “other customary rites on behalf of the god and lord, the king” (*PLond VII* 2193 = *AGRW* 295; I BCE). Although the nature of our sources means that we rarely have record of an association actually praying corporately (but see Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.17, cited in chapter eight), we do have monuments that were set up in connection with a group’s earlier

prayer-request for a favor from a god and the accompanying vow.<sup>13</sup>

One example of an association's vow from Maionia (near Saittai) in Lydia involved two stages, and we happen to have both monuments in our possession, each of which involves the Phrygian deity Men (see figures 5 and 6 in the previous chapter). The first monument states that "the sacred association (*doumos*) orders that a vow to Zeus Masphalatenos, Men Tiamou, and Men Tyrannos ("the Ruler") be observed after nine days" (*TAM V 536* = *CMRDM* II 53; 171 CE). Above the inscription is a relief of two gods, one depicted as a sun god (likely Men Tiamou) and the other as a moon god (likely Men Tyrannos). The second monument appears to be the fulfillment of the vow "according the command of the ruling lord Zeus Masphalatenos and Men," and it lists the 18 contributing members' names, all male (*TAM V 537* = *CMRDM* I 54). The relief on the second monument shows the god Men in Phrygian garb with his left foot on the head of a prostrate bull on the left and Zeus holding an eagle on the right.

Singing and music could be important within associations.<sup>14</sup> Hymns were an elaborated, sung *prayer* which also honored the deities whose help was requested, as J. M. Bremer (1981) points out. Quite common in Asia Minor were official organizations of boys, girls or youths who regularly sang in the context of civic cults and festivals.<sup>15</sup> There were also functionaries associated with the composition or performance of hymns in honor of the gods in connection with both the mysteries of Demeter and of Dionysos at Pergamon, for instance.<sup>16</sup> The so-called Orphic hymns, which likely come from western Asia Minor (probably Pergamon), make frequent reference to the Dionysiac initiates and cowherds who sang them (Athanasakis 1977). There were other associations who called themselves "hymn-singers" (*hymnōdoi*), like those devoted to Cybele near Thyatira and to Dionysos at Histria in Moesia (*TAM V 955*, = *AGRW* 142; *IHistria* 167 = *AGRW* 72).

It is worth noting here the similar importance attached to singing within congregations and synagogues as well. After questioning the Christ-devotees brought before him in Pontus, Pliny characterizes their gatherings in terms familiar from the activities of associations: they "met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately amongst themselves in honor of Christ as if to a god" (*Epistles* 10.96.7). Philo's discussion of the "contemplative life" of the Judean therapists (servants of the God) in Egypt likewise provides a similar picture concerning the prominence of singing (alongside prayer, meals, and other activities):

After the dinner (deipnon) they celebrate the sacred festival through the whole night . . . [T]hey sing hymns which have been composed in honor of God in many metres and tunes, sometimes singing together and at other times moving their hands and dancing in corresponding harmony. . . . Then, when each chorus of the men and each chorus of the women has feasted separately by itself, like persons in the Bacchic festivities, drinking the

13 Cf. *MAMA* IV 230 (Tymandos); *IGR* IV 548 (Orkistos); *IPhrygDB* III 1 (Dorylaion); *SEG* 41 (1991), no. 1329 (Karain, Pamphylia). On votive offerings (i.e. gifts for the gods in return for answered prayer), see van Straten 1981.

14 Cf. Poland 1926; Quasten 1983.

15 See, for example, *LSAM* 69 (Stratonikea); *ICarie* 132-39, 192-96 (Heraklea-Salbake); *IEph* 18d (lines 4-24); *IEph* 1145.

16 See Hepding 1910, 457-59 (no. 40); Ippel 1912, 287 (no. 16); *IPergamon* 485. Cf. *IEph* 275, 973-974; *ISmyrna* 758.

pure wine of the love of God, they join together and the two become one chorus in imitation of that chorus that was established in ancient times by the Red Sea, on account of the wondrous works which were displayed there. . . (*On the Contemplative Life* 83-89 = *AGRW* L9).

Philo's description alludes to the analogy of Bacchic mysteries. His mention of ritual dancing in honor of God brings us to another activity within associations.

We have already encountered musicians and dancers in the earlier discussion of reliefs depicting the meetings of associations. Lucian's discourse *On the Dance* – set in the form of a dialogue in which a Cynic, Crato, is convinced of the value of pantomimic dancing by Lycinus – emphasizes the close connection between dancing and honoring deities, even suggesting that “not a single ancient rite (*teletēn*) can be found that is without dancing” (*On the Dance* 15). Along with the discussion of dances associated with cults in honor of Zeus, Aphrodite, Orpheus, and others, Lucian has Lycinus note the following in connection with Dionysiac mysteries in Asia Minor:

Bacchic dancing is particularly popular in Ionia and Pontus. It has taken such possession of people there, that, when the season comes around in each city, they leave everything else and sit for days watching Titans and Corybantes, satyrs and cowherds (*boukoloi*). Those of noble birth and the highest positions are not ashamed to take part in these performances (*On the Dance* 79 = *AGRW* L16; cf. Artemidoros, *Dream Interpretations* 4.39).

The association of “dancing cowherds” at Pergamon was not the only group that honored the gods and portrayed their myths by way of dance, and we know that dancing could also play a role in the rituals of other associations, such as those devoted to Sarapis.

So honoring gods and goddesses in a variety of ways was a common concern for virtually all types of associations and their members. By participating in such activities, the members of associations were helping to maintain appropriate relations between human communities and the deities who protected and provided benefactions for people in their everyday lives. Sacrifices or offerings of animals, foods, and drink were often at the focal point of these honors, and these offerings were almost always accompanied by a meal among the participants.

## ***2. Social and Feasting Activities***

An element of group-life that is often discussed in connection with social purposes pertains to the eating and drinking that went on at associations' festivals and banquets.<sup>17</sup> However, we should be wary of accepting too whole-heartedly the opinions of Judean or Christian apologists, such as Philo or Tertullian, for instance. Philo spends a good part of his discourse on the Judean therapeutists near Alexandria contrasting the “mysteries” of their sanctified, ascetic life to the “frenzy and madness” of Greco-Roman banquets and associations (*On the Contemplative Life*, esp. 40ff; cf. Seland 1996). According to him, most associations, in contrast to Judean gatherings, of course, were “founded on no sound principle but on strong liquor, drunkenness, intoxicated violence and their offspring, wantonness” (*Against Flaccus* 136-37 = *AGRW* L10; cf. *Embassy to Gaius* 312-13 = *AGRW* L37). Writing a couple of centuries after Philo, Tertullian clearly has in mind “pagan”

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17 For a recent survey of associations at meal, see Ascough 2008.

associations when, in defending and promoting the virtues of the Christian association (*factio, corpus*), he states that the financial contributions of Christians “are not spent on banquets, drinking, or ungracious eating-houses,” but on helping the poor and ensuring their burial (*Apology* 39.5–6 and 38–39 generally = *AGRW* L18). Of course, Philo and Tertullian were not alone in describing meetings of *others* in such negative terms for apologetic or entertainment purposes. The fact that they chose associations as the object of their rather one-sided comparison, however, shows how both Judeans and Christians (as well as outsiders) could express their identities in terms drawn from the common life of associations.

As I argue at length elsewhere (Harland 2009, 161–181), stories of secretive, nocturnal, and uncontrolled banquets involving drunkenness and, at times, somewhat extreme rituals – incestuous sex, ritual murder, and cannibalism among them – were the mainstay of mud-slinging and a source of novelistic shock-value among upper-class authors in antiquity, particularly in dealing with foreigners and cultural minorities. A novel by Lollianos (of which only fragments survive), for example, depicts an association engaging in ritual infanticide followed by a cannibalistic communal meal and promiscuous sexual activity.<sup>18</sup> Challenging Henrich’s views of Lollianos’ novel (which suggests that the story derives from knowledge of actual rituals as practiced by some ethnic groups), Jack Winkler (1980) convincingly argues that it is precisely in *inverting* what was commonly assumed to be normal or acceptable cultic practice within associations that these episodes found their shock and entertainment value. One wonders how much of Livy’s description of the subversive and secretive meetings of Dionysiac groups (Bacchanalia) in republican Rome, involving sexual excesses, murder, and other crimes, corresponds more with such novelistic stereotypes and elite pretensions (in the age of Augustus) than with the reality of what happened in 186 BCE (Livy, *History of Rome* 39.8–19; cf. Gruen 1990).

Some outsiders’ accusations against Christian groups – Thyestan feasts (cannibalism) and Oedipian unions (incest), for instance – drew on the same stock-pile of fantastic popular lore, as did many “orthodox” attacks against “heretics.”<sup>19</sup> Yet the reasons for such accusations could be quite different in the case of Christians and Judeans, pertaining to their failure to fully participate in local cultic life, especially sacrifices for the deities of other peoples. Moreover, we must refrain from accepting descriptions of wild “impious” meetings of associations, whether Judean, Christian or other, at face value, as though they realistically describe actual practices among a significant number of the groups in question.

Though there is truth in the observation that eating and drinking were important activities, and sometimes this might be interpreted as disorderly behavior in the eyes of some (cf. Paul’s comments on Christian assemblies in 1 Cor 11:17–34), we should not reduce the purposes of associations to mere conviviality or exaggerate the uncontrolled nature of meetings (now see Harland 2012). First of all, there was a set of expectations and values concerning behavior, sometimes set in stone as statutes, which helped to maintain order during the meetings and banquets of associations. The regulations of the association devoted to Zeus Hypsistos in Egypt and the Bacchic devotees (Iobacchoi) at Athens, for instance, both included rules (with

18 Henrichs 1970; Henrichs 1972.

19 Cf. Eusebius, *HE*. 5.1.14; Tertullian, *Apology* 9.9; Benko 1980, 1081–89; Edwards 1992.



accompanying punishments) regarding obedience to the leaders, as well as proscriptions against members causing disturbances or attempting to take the seat of other members during gatherings (*PLond* VII 2193 = *AGRW* 295; *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 1368 = *AGRW* 7).

Behavioral norms could be upheld in more subtle ways than this. A dream retold by Artemidoros reflects a member's feelings of falling short of the expectations of other fellow-members of an association. His dream involves a radical violation of unstated rules: "Someone who belonged to an association (*sympiōsis*) and brotherhood (*phratría*) dreamt he lifted up his clothes in front of his fellow association members (*sympiōtai*) and urinated upon each of them. He was expelled from the brotherhood as dishonorable. For it is understandable that those who engage in such drunken behavior would be hated and expelled" (*Dream Interpretations* 4.44). Apparently his dream reflected his failure to live up to other standards of the group (that resulted in his actual expulsion); his violation of standards was probably less drastic than the one he dreamt (one would hope).

The fact that banqueting activities could be viewed as a means of honoring or communing with deities further suggests caution in reducing the purposes of associations to the social in the way that Nilsson and others do. The inseparable character of feasting and honoring the gods is illustrated in Dio of Prusa's remarks: "What festivity could delight without the presence of the most important thing of all [friendship]? What symposium could please without the good cheer of the guests? What sacrifice is acceptable to the gods without those celebrating the feast?" (*Orations* 3.97).<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that, for virtually all associations and guilds, sacrifice or libations accompanied or preceded the banquet. Judean synagogues (at least in the diaspora, it seems) and Christian assemblies did *not* engage in actual sacrifice, however; though the Christian concept of the Lord's supper was certainly expressed in sacrificial terms (cf. Mark 14:12-25; 1 Cor 11:23-26).

For some groups food and drink or the meal itself could be an essential element in the myth and ritual of the deity in question. How could a worshiper of Dionysos, for example, appropriately honor or identify with the god of wine without drinking as a central practice? Gods such as Sarapis could also be considered present with the association in its festal gatherings, as a passage in Aelius Aristides of Smyrna shows:

People make this god [Sarapis] alone a full partner in sacrifices, inviting him to the meal (*hestia*) and making him both chief guest and host. So while different gods contribute to different club-feasts (*eranoi*), he is the one who completes all feasts and has the rank of leader of the banquet (*symposiarchēs*) for those who assemble at times . . . He is a participant in the libations and the one who receives the libations. He comes to the celebration and invites those celebrating, who perform a dance under his direction (*Orations* 45.27-28 = *AGRW* L13).

In one of several invitations to such banquets found in Egypt, Sarapis himself is the host who bids his guests to attend (*PKöln* 57; cf. *NewDocs* I 1). Conviviality was not the antithesis of fittingly honoring the gods in antiquity, and we need to set aside restrictive conceptions of "religion" which would suggest otherwise. A brief look at some architectural remains will further illustrate the interweaving of feasting and honoring the gods.

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20 Trans. by Stowers 1995, 298-99.

The earlier discussion of buildings at Ostia and Delos suggested that the remains of buildings could bring to life the purposes of associations. Rarely have the remains of actual buildings or banqueting-halls of associations been discovered or identified in Asia Minor, so it is worth giving some attention to one that has: the meeting-hall of the cowherds devoted to the god Dionysos at Pergamon, the so-called “*Podiensaal*” or “Hall of Benches” (see figure 18).<sup>21</sup> This building, which was excavated and restored in 1978 with results published by Wolfgang Radt (1979) and now more extensively by Holger Schwarzer (2002, 2008), lies in a residential area on the southern slope of the acropolis, almost directly north from the sanctuary of Demeter. Also nearby was a sanctuary with a cult-hall and small odeion which was dedicated to a hero named Diodoros Paspáros of Pergamon. This “Heroon” building was most likely used as the meeting-place of another cult-association in the Roman period (Radt 1999, 249–54). The identification of the hall of benches as the cowherds’ meeting-place is virtually certain. The building was set back from the street behind a row of shops with an alley leading to the hall’s courtyard on the south side. At the west end of the courtyard were two running fountains and a small vestibule entering into two small rooms, perhaps small service-rooms or storage areas.



Figure 18: Hall of Benches (*Podiensaal*) of the cowherds at Pergamon.

21 For the following building description, see Radt 1979, 321–23; Radt 1988, 224–28; Radt 1999, 196–99; Schwarzer 2006; and, most extensively, Schwarzer 2008.

The hall proper was largely symmetrical, measuring 24 meters from west to east and 10 meters from north to south, and it was ideal for the cultic and banqueting activities of the cowherds. There was a large bench (1 meter high and 2 meters deep), seen in the photo, running alongside all four walls, except at the central entrance on the south and the cult-niche opposite it on the north. Members of the association reclined on the benches with their feet towards the wall and their heads towards the centre of the room, where an altar for sacrifices stood. A small marble slab or shelf ran along the length of the benches, serving as a place for banqueters to set down their food and drinks. Excavators found bone-remnants of beef, swine, and poultry ground into the floor, some of them the remains of sacrificial victims offered to the god. Under the benches, at regular intervals, are found niches, which probably served as storage areas for cultic implements, as Radt suggests.

The entire hall was plastered and painted. The decoration and other objects found there attest to the importance of the patron deity and his myths for the association. Dionysiac scenes—only a small portion of which were still visible when excavated—were painted on the main walls, one section depicting an altar with fire and a *thyrsos*, the holy reed or wand of the god. A painting with Dionysiac connections was also still visible on the western wall of the cult-niche. This depicted wine leaves and grapes against a red background, along with a man dressed in sacrificial garb as Silenos. There were members with the title “Silenos” in other inscriptions pertaining to the cowherds at Pergamon ([IPergamon 485](#)). Though the mythology varies, this Silenos (sometimes described as chief of the satyrs who accompanied Dionysos and who could also be called “*silenoi*”) was often viewed as an old and cheerful drunkard and foster-father of the child Dionysos (see figure 19). Finally, two altars were found in or near the building, one of which depicts a wine cup and garland. These had evidently been damaged in an earlier meeting-place, perhaps by an earthquake, and subsequently reused in this building. Both were set up by Herodes, a chief-cowherd (*archiboukolos*) during the reign of Augustus; one was dedicated to Caesar Augustus and the other to Dionysos Kathegemon ([SEG 40 \[1990\], no. 1136](#); [SEG 29 \[1979\], no. 1264](#); Radt 1999, 199).



Figure 19: Bronze statuette of Silenos from the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum, now in the Naples Archaeological Museum.



Before going on to the funerary purposes of associations, it is worth saying a few words about another building which has been unearthed, this one at Athens in Attica, Greece. Wilhelm Dörpfeld's excavations of the late 1880s in an area west of the Athenian acropolis, between the Pnyx and the Areopagos, uncovered the site of an ancient triangular precinct which, although not necessarily the famous Dionysion in the Marshes, as originally thought, was probably dedicated to Dionysos.<sup>22</sup> Some time before the mid-second century the devotees of Dionysos Bacchus (Iobacchoi) decided to construct a meeting-place within this ancient sacred space. The building or Baccheion,<sup>23</sup> as it is called, measured about 11 meters wide by 18 meters long, consisting of a large hall with two rows of columns, which divided the structure into a central nave and two aisles (see figure 20). It was here that they gathered for their festivals and meetings including a sacred play re-enacting stories of the gods and the priest's sacred discourse. Alfred Schäfer (2002) also recently argues for the multi-functional nature of this building.

Several artifacts found within the structure point to the importance of goddesses and gods for those who used the building. At the eastern end of the building, within an apse, was found an altar decorated with Dionysiac motifs, including a sacrificial goat, a satyr (horned male attendant of the god) and a maenad (female attendant of the god). A small shrine devoted to Artemis appears to have been located in a room just north of this apse. Also near the altar were sculptural objects including a head of Dionysos, a statue of Pan, several reliefs depicting Cybele, and statuettes of Aphrodite and of Hekate.<sup>24</sup>

An inscribed column was found alongside the altar, including a Dionysiac scene depicting the head of a bull above two panthers on either side of a large drinking vessel (see figure 21). This column identifies the building as the meeting-place (Baccheion) of the association. The inscription on it ([IG II<sup>2</sup> 1368](#) = *AGRW* 7)—one of the lengthiest texts about an association in the Roman era—relates the minutes of a meeting in which the leaders and members of the association decided to have their rules more permanently inscribed in stone. The members' pride and sense of belonging becomes quite evident when they shout: "Long life to the most excellent priest, Herodes! Now you have good fortune! Now we are the best of all Bacchic societies!" Their recently appointed priest, Claudius Herodes, can be identified with the extremely wealthy and influential Claudius Herodes Attikos, and the events recorded in the inscription pertain to a time shortly before 164 CE (not the third century, as originally thought). The inscription provides information concerning the meetings and rituals of the group and the roles and responsibilities of members and leaders (priest, vice-priest, and chief-bacchant). The group gathered quite frequently, "on the ninth of each

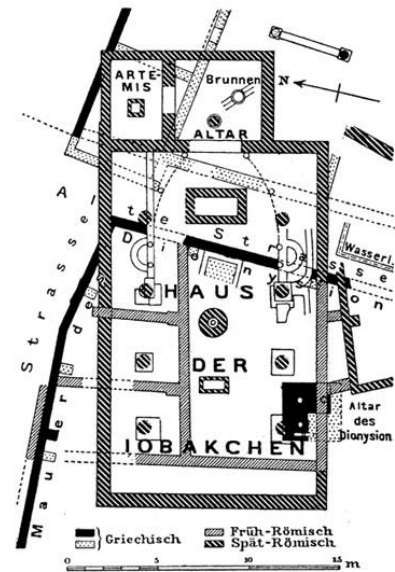


Figure 20: Plan of the meeting-place of the Iobacchoi at Athens.

22 Dörpfeld 1894, 1895; Hooker 1960.

23 For other uses of "Baccheion" for a meeting-place, see *IDidyma* 502; *ISmyrna* 733; *IEph* 434; *IPerinthos* 56 = *AGRW* 64; *SEG* 53 (2003), no 726 = *AGRW* 78 (Nikopolis ad Istrum, Moesia)

24 Dörpfeld 1894, 148; Schäfer 2002, 175-177, 189-205.

month, on the annual festival, on Bacchic holidays and if there is any occasional feast of the god.” When they did, participants were expected to “speak, act or do some honorable deed” (lines 42-46). The group also performed customary libations and sacrifices along with accompanying feasts in honor of Dionysos. They held wine-feasts at the death of a member (lines 159-63), which brings us to another important purpose of associations.



Figure 21: Drawing of the inscribed column containing the rules of the Iobacchoi at Athens.

### 3. Funerary Activities

The connection between feasting functions and funerary ones could be quite direct. A passage from Artemidoros illustrates this well:

A man dreamt that his fellow association members (*sympiōtai*) and brothers (*phratores*) suddenly appeared and said to him, “Receive us as guests and provide us dinner.” He replied, “I do not have the money nor the means to receive you.” Then he sent them away. On the next day, he was in a shipwreck, facing extreme danger and barely escaping with his life . . . For it is customary for members of an association (*sympiōtai*) to go to the house of the deceased and to dine there, and it is said that the reception is given by the deceased in return for honors paid to him by the members of the association . . . It was a shipwreck because he sent them away due to a lack of funds. (*Dream Interpretations* 5.82 = *AGRW* L14).

It was common practice for associations of all kinds in Asia Minor to hold similar funerary feasts or wine-banquets in memory of deceased members, including customary burial rituals.

There were several other practices associated with death and burial which can be mentioned here.<sup>25</sup> First of all, associations could provide burial for their members, often collecting contributions or fees which went towards the cost of the funerary rituals or the actual burial of members. There were numerous epitaphs set up for the deceased by the association he or she belonged to, and at Saittai alone, for instance, there were dozens of epitaphs erected by occupational associations or groups of “friends” (→ [Saittai](#)). Christian congregations, too, could serve a similar purpose, providing burial and related funerary honors for their members, especially the less-fortunate (cf. Tertullian, *Apology* 39.5–6 = *AGRW* L18).

Ensuring burial could be of greater or lesser importance depending on the economic circumstances of the members. The regulations of the association (*collegium*) devoted to Diana and Antinoos at Lanuvium in Italy, for example, devote extensive attention to the burial of a member, presumably because proper burial was something which the lower-class members might not otherwise have been able to afford (*CIL XIV 2112* = *AGRW* 310; 136 CE). Among them are rules regarding procedures for burial if a member happens to die further than twenty miles away from town, as well as a stipulation that if a member commits suicide the right to burial by the association would be forfeited. On the other hand, the rules of the Iobacchoi at Athens—a group consisting of a notable number of wealthier members—say little of the procedures for ensuring actual burial, mentioning only the funerary wine-banquet: “If an Iobacchos dies, let there be a wreath up to the cost of 5 drachmai and let a single jar of wine be set before those who attend the funeral. But do not let anyone who was absent from the funeral itself have any of the wine” (*IG II<sup>2</sup> 1368*, lines 159–163). Although from an earlier era in Egypt, it is worth mentioning two papyri in which family members (a sister in one, a brother in another) register a complaint with the king regarding the failure of a society (*thiasos*) to abide by its own rules in paying for the burial of a member (*PEnteuxis* 20 = *AGRW* 293; *PEnteuxis* 21 = *AGRW* 292; ca. 220 BCE). A similar expectation that members of a guild should give attention to burying a fellow-worker seems to lie behind a curse in an epigram from the island of Kos: “Farewell, good Damas! May my fellow-workers (*homotechnoi*)

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25 On funerary functions, see Fraser 1977, 58–70; Nijf 1997, 31–69.

who took no notice of me encounter the same fate from you, father (i.e. the god), but may those who placed me under the earth enjoy life” (*IKosPH 324*; see figure 22).

Δ Α Μ Α  
Χ Ρ Η Σ Τ Ε  
Χ Α Ι Ρ Ε  
Ο Ι Μ Ε Υ Ρ Ε Ρ Ι Δ Ο Ν Τ Ε Σ  
Ο Μ Ο Τ Ε Χ Ν Ο Ι Τ Ω Ν Α Υ Τ Ω Ν  
Σ Ε Υ Ρ Α Τ Ε Ρ Α Ν Τ Ι Τ Υ Χ Ο Ι Σ Α Ν  
Ο Ι Δ Υ Ρ Ο Γ Η Ν Θ Ε Ν Τ Ε Σ  
Ο Ν Α Ι Ν Τ Ο Β Ι Ο Υ

Figure 22: Facsimile of  
*IKosPH 324*.

A second funerary function of associations is attested with groups that had a communal cemetery or collective tomb. This was the case with the guild of flax-workers at Smyrna who received a vault as a donation (*ISmyrna 218* = *AGRW 201*; cf. *IEph 2213*). The Selgian craftsmen living at Lamos in Cilicia likewise had their own collective tomb, with each member owning a share which could not be sold to non-members (*IKilikiaBM II 201* = *AGRW 215*). P. M. Fraser (1977, 58–70) discusses the extensive evidence for communal burial plots among associations on the island Rhodes, where burial boundary markers for the collective cemeteries have been found.

A third funerary-related activity involves the deceased arranging some financial benefit or potential benefit for an association. First of all, it was common in certain regions of Asia Minor (particularly Ionia, Phrygia, and Lydia) for associations of various kinds to receive financial foundations from a wealthy individual, provided that the members took care of the grave regularly or commemorated the patron’s death-day. Associations of Judeans, silversmiths, physicians, and hemp-workers at Ephesos were assigned responsibility for the upkeep of graves (*IEph 1677* = *AGRW 174*; *IEph 2212* = *AGRW 161*; *IEph 2304* = *AGRW 175*; *SEG 43 [1993], no. 812*). In an epitaph of a devotee of the Judean God from Hierapolis, the owners follow local custom in making provisions for the guilds of purple-dyers and carpet-weavers to crown the grave on certain Roman and Judean festivals, commemorating the death of the deceased (*IJO II 196* = *AGRW 152*). The Christian tradition of gathering at the grave of a well-respected member or “witness” (martyrs) on the anniversary of his or her death, which became increasingly important, is closely related to this commemorative funerary custom. The case of Polycarp at Smyrna in Ionia is an early example (cf. *Mart. Poly.* 18.1–3).

Frequently, associations (along with other groups and civic institutions) were made the recipients of any potential fines for violation of the grave. At Kyzikos and the nearby island of Prokonessos, for example, guilds of marble workers, clothing-cleaners, fishermen, and porters were named in epitaphs as recipients of any fines incurred for violation of the grave (*IKyzikos I 97*; *IKyzikos I 211*; *IKyzikos I 260*; *IKyzikos I 291* = *AGRW 111*). When Rufina, the head of the synagogue at Smyrna, prepared a common tomb for her household, she made the fines for violation payable to the Judean association (*ethnos*), and a copy of the inscription was put into the civic archives (*ISmyrna 295* = *AGRW 196*; III CE). Many Judeans and Christians in these same cities followed suit in adopting similar funerary-related customs, as J. H. M. Strubbe (1997) demonstrates.

These funerary functions could be an integral part of group life which helped to provide members with a sense of belonging and community. A poetic memorial from the vicinity of Magnesia Sipylus illustrates how feelings of allegiance might continue to the grave among fellow-



members of associations: “. . . Now, I, who first displayed zeal and trust for the society (*thiasos*), lie here. My name was Menophilos. For the sake of honor, men set up this monument. . .” (*IManisa* 354; 180 or 234 CE).

## Conclusion

The purposes of associations outlined here are by no means exhaustive, but they begin to give a general picture of associative life which we will need to keep in mind as we turn to other dimensions of associations. The gatherings of such groups were occasions for ongoing social interaction and conviviality. Inseparable from this, they were also a place where members could fittingly honor the goddesses and gods (including emperors) who protected the group and the members’ families in daily life, at work, and at home. The association’s role continued to the grave and beyond as associations honored members on an epitaph or regularly gathered at the grave of a benefactor or member. If one were to inquire what it was that such groups offered their members, then, the answer would be manifold. Certainly, however, through a combination of purposes, associations could offer their members a sense of belonging and identity.<sup>26</sup> When we turn to the external relations of these groups, we will begin to see how group-identity could be expressed within a broader civic and imperial context, less in terms of conflict or opposition than in terms of integration and participation.

Associations did provide their members with a sense of belonging, but this does not necessarily mean, as many scholars assume, that such groups were therefore principally a compensation for decline in other social or cultural structures of belonging within the city. Joining and feeling at home within the association was not necessarily a response to deficiencies elsewhere. Nor was this belonging incompatible with a continuing sense of having a place within the structures of the city, which was part of the larger world of province and empire.

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26 Contrast the assertions of Burkert (1987, 43–53) regarding societies devoted to the mysteries.



### 3 / SYMPTOMS OF CIVIC DECLINE OR PARTICIPANTS IN VITALITY?

#### Introduction

As small groups offering members a sense of belonging, associations have had a significant role to play within scholarly theories regarding the nature of civic life and society in the Hellenistic (from 323 BCE) and Roman imperial (from 27 BCE) eras. More specifically, one prominent scholarly tradition explains associations as compensatory phenomena in a period of civic decline. From this perspective, these groups offered a replacement for the attachment that the populace had previously, but no longer, felt in relation to social, cultural, and political structures of the *polis* (the Greek city, or city-state). Closely related are approaches which focus on the supposed incompatibility or even opposition between most of these groups and civic or imperial structures under Roman rule. Yet such approaches are problematic.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to consider in broad strokes how we should understand the place of associations within the city while also outlining some key structures of urban life. Challenging common scholarly characterizations of associations as symptoms of decline or as substitutes for membership in the city, I argue that the actual evidence for associations' relations within cities in Asia Minor provides a very different picture. Instead of fitting associations into broader theories of decline, which are questionable in themselves, we need to look at the concrete ways in which associations related to the city and its social, cultural, and political structures. Doing so provides a picture of associations as participants in civic vitality alongside other persons, groups, and institutions. Approaching things from different angles, recent studies by Onno van Nijf (1997), Andreas Gutsfeld (1998), Stefan Sommer (2006), and Dorothea Rohde (2012) similarly point to integrative functions of associations within society. Although focussing on Egypt, Philip Venticinque (2009, 2010) makes similar arguments against the idea that associations were primarily compensatory phenomena for the decline in the importance of the family and other social structures. My discussion here prepares the way for a better understanding of the participation of associations in imperial cults and connections specifically while also shedding light on the place of such groups within society in the Greek East more generally. It should be remembered that these are the same social, political, and cultural structures which Judeans and Jesus-followers encountered in their daily lives.

I begin by outlining and challenging common theories regarding the place of associations within the city in the Hellenistic and Roman eras. This is followed by a section on the civic framework and developments in the Roman era, especially regarding social networks of benefaction. Finally, I deal with primary evidence regarding the actual relations between associations and the city in this region, pointing out three main areas of participation (political, social, and cultural).

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1 Harland 2006a takes this chapter in a slightly different direction, focussing more attention on the theory of civic decline specifically.

## Assessing Scholarly Theories: Associations as Symptoms of Decline?

The characterization of associations as symptoms of civic decline or as compensations for a loss of attachments to the political, social, and cultural structures of the Greek *polis* (city) is common in scholarship since the late nineteenth century and is sometimes repeated by contemporary scholars.<sup>2</sup> Often associations are placed within a broader theory of decline which emphasizes the “failure” of the *polis* in the fourth century BCE followed by a steady degeneration of political, social, and cultural facets of civic life in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.<sup>3</sup> According to Erich Ziebarth (1896, 191–93), the origins and continued success of associations can be attributed to these radical social changes. From this perspective, associations were a response to individuals’ feelings of detachment. These groups were a replacement for the sense of belonging formerly felt in relation to structures of the city.

One particular version of this theory regarding the place of associations within culture in this period is worth outlining in some detail. It is important to note that not all who suggest that associations were compensations for civic structures would necessarily subscribe to all aspects of this particular characterization of cultural and religious developments. Nonetheless, W. S. Ferguson’s overview of the “leading ideas” of the Hellenistic age in the first edition of *The Cambridge Ancient History* (1928) reflects widespread views which are evident in the works of influential scholars of Greco-Roman religion including M. P. Nilsson, André-Jean Festugière, E. R. Dodds, and those who depend on them, such as Peter Green.<sup>4</sup> According to these scholars, the vitality of traditional Greek religion was bound to the effectiveness of the autonomous and democratic *polis* of the classical era (fifth–fourth centuries BCE). With its decline from the late-fourth to third centuries came the downfall of the *polis*’s religious system, leaving an “empty shell” with little vestige of “genuine religion”—the “ancient gods were tottering,” in Nilsson’s words.<sup>5</sup> These scholars claim that although individuals continued to participate in the outward ceremonies of communal rituals, their feelings and attitudes were no longer evoked by them.<sup>6</sup> To claim such special access to the feelings of historical subjects is problematic in the least.

In this view the decline of the *polis*’ structures also led to other important trends including the rise of “individualism,” which was the “dominant feature of the age,” according to Ferguson and

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2 Cf. Ziebarth 1896, 191–93; Poland 1909, 516; Tod 1932, 71–73; Dill 1956 [1904], 256; Herrmann et al. 1978, 94; Smith 1978, 187.

3 See, for instance, Tarn and Griffith 1952 [1927], 47–125; Mossé 1973; Kreissig 1974; Ste. Croix 1981.

4 Nilsson 1964 [1925]; Nilsson 1961; Festugière 1972 [1945]; Festugière 1960; Dodds 1959, 179–206, 236–69. Recent scholarship still depends on these scholars (e.g. Green 1990, 382–413, 586–601).

5 See Nilsson 1964 [1925], 260–62, 274–75, 285. Cf. Murray 1935 [1925], 106–108, 158–163; Martin 1987, 3.

6 Some scholars claim to have some sort of additional knowledge beyond what the evidence of continued participation in traditional cults suggests. Festugière, for example, asserts that the decline of civic religions is an “undeniable fact.” What it comes down to is that this undeniable fact is based on Festugière’s claim to be able to distinguish between the “outer form” of the cults which he admits continued to function largely unchanged (i.e. the only evidence we have), on the one hand, and the “feelings” and “attitudes” of those who participated, on the other, which he asserts were no longer attached to the civic cults, and correspondingly, to the city (Festugière 1960, 37–38; cf. Dodds 1959, 243–44; Green 1990, 587; Nilsson 1964 [1925], 295).

others.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as traditional structures of belonging broke down, individuals in the Hellenistic era (unlike the classical era, it is supposed) suffered from a general malaise characterized by feelings of detachment, isolation, and uncertainty. Feelings of “loneliness and helplessness in a vast disintegrating world” led them to seek substitutes for the attachments they had previously felt in relation to the *polis* and its structures.<sup>8</sup> Among these substitutes which filled a social or cultural vacuum were new “private” forms of social or religious life, especially associations.

One of the most important responses to feelings of dislocation was the rise of what Nilsson and Festugière call “private” or “personal” religion. This was a replacement for the outward and increasingly artificial “public” religion. As traditional civic religious structures declined, clubs, associations, and mystery societies, which involved the individual’s voluntary choice in joining, were the most successful social-religious unit.<sup>9</sup> These smaller groups provided a replacement for the sense of belonging and attachment that individuals previously felt towards the civic community and its religious structures, from this scholarly perspective.

More recent scholarship which continues to hold some, though not all, of the views outlined above tends to define associations as phenomena over against society, sometimes expressing this in subversive terms. In some respects J. K. Davies’ survey of cultural features of the Hellenistic world (in the second edition of *The Cambridge Ancient History*) qualifies aspects of the above outlined theory of decline. Yet he still suggests that several new forms of religious life in this period challenged declining traditional civic religion. Among them he includes associations which, he asserts, “ran counter to city-based religion and society” (1984, 318 [emphasis added]). In a similar manner, Richard Gordon (1990, 240, 245–52) still speaks of the “oriental religions” and private mystery associations as “forms of resistance” against both the civic model of religion and elite culture.

G. E. M. de Ste. Croix emphasizes the political background to the tense relationship between associations and society. In the classical period, democracy by means of the assembly (*ekklēsia*) of the People (*dēmos*) permitted the real participation of all strata of the population, giving the lower classes an avenue of political activity and a sense of belonging. However, according to Ste. Croix, there was a disintegration of democracy in the Hellenistic and Roman eras which led to the detachment of the majority of the population from the structures of the *polis* (Ste. Croix 1981, 300–26, 518–37). Within this framework, Ste. Croix (1981, 318–20) considers the activities of guilds and associations (e.g. civic disturbances) among the means of social protest or resistance which compensated for the lower classes’ lack of participation in the life of the *polis*. From this perspective, associations offered a substitute structure of belonging and alternative means of participation to that of the city and its political assembly. One can understand how scholars who hold such views would tend to pay far more attention to the tensions between these groups and society, neglecting the ways in which associations were participants within the *polis*.

There are several difficulties with approaches that see associations as compensatory phenomena in a period of civic decline. The theories outlined above do not adequately address the extensive primary evidence concerning actual relationships between associations (and their members) and the

7 Ferguson 1928, 4. Cf. Nilsson 1964, 282–83, 287; Farnell 1912, 137, 140–41, 147–50; Guthrie 1955, 256, 334.

8 Ferguson 1928, 35. Cf. Martin 1987, 3, 23, 58.

9 Cf. Festugière 1960, 40; Dodds 1959, 243.

*polis*, which I discuss at length below. For now it is important to note several theoretical shortcomings of these views and difficulties with the assumptions involved.

First, recent years have seen the beginning of a shift away from the overall paradigm of decline in the study of the *polis*, which should caution us in simply plugging associations into these theories. And so Louis Robert, whose knowledge of the inscriptions of Asia Minor remains unparalleled, states that “the Greek city did not die at Chaironeia, nor under Alexander, nor during the course of the entire Hellenistic epoch.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, P. J. Rhodes, Walter Eder, Mogens Herman Hansen, and Erich Gruen question key interpretations in previous scholarship concerning an early crisis and decline, reaffirming instead the continued importance and vitality of the Greek city despite changes and developments.<sup>11</sup> Regarding Asia Minor specifically, Stephen Mitchell (1993, 1.199) argues that, despite the loss of complete autonomy, the cities continued as effective centers of administration and they “were, in a very positive sense, communities.”

Theories regarding the decline of the Greek city broadly are often based on a particular and questionable interpretation of two main issues: autonomy and democracy. Hansen’s studies rightly challenge the notion that autonomy was the central ingredient of the *polis* without which decline was inevitable. Every “city-state would of course have preferred to be autonomous, but . . . a city-state did not lose its identity as a city by being subjected to another city-state or, for example, to the king of Persia, or Macedon, or a Hellenistic ruler, or Rome” (Hansen 1993, 19). Furthermore, some adherents of decline theories over-state the degree to which Hellenistic kings and Roman emperors or officials actively interfered in the affairs of the cities. Fergus Millar, G. P. Burton, and P. A. Brunt point instead to the passive and reactive character of Roman rule in the imperial period.<sup>12</sup> Seldom did the emperors or other Roman authorities actively interfere in the affairs of the cities unless public disorders could not be handled locally or action was requested from below.<sup>13</sup> As Brunt states, “it was not the practice of the Romans to govern much. The governor had only a small staff, and he did little more than defend his province, ensure the collection of the taxes and decide the most important criminal and civil cases. *The local communities were left in the main to run their own affairs.*”<sup>14</sup>

Another basis of the theory of decline which is in need of qualification is the degree to which the typical Greek city of the Hellenistic and Roman periods represents a degeneration from an earlier form of democracy. Some scholars tend to idealize classical Athenian democracy and allow modern conceptions of democracy to shape the discussion, resulting in a picture of full participation of the People in the classical era which does not accurately reflect the reality of the situation.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, as Rhodes (1994, 189 n.102) states in reference to Ste. Croix’s theories, “the failure of democracy would not be the same thing as the failure of the city, and it is not obvious that either occurred.” There is evidence that the assembly (*ekklēsia*) of the People (*dēmos*)

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10 Robert 1969, 42 (trans. mine): La “cité grecque n’est pas morte à Chéronée, ni sous Alexandre, ni dans le cours de toute l’époque hellénistique.”

11 Rhodes 1994; Eder 1995; Hansen 1993, 1994a, 1994b; Gruen 1993. Cf. Gauthier 1985, 1993.

12 Millar 1977; Burton 1975; Brunt 1990.

13 See Oliver 1954, refuting Magie 1950, 641, 1504, n.21.

14 Brunt 1990, 116–17 (emphasis added).

15 See Saxonhouse 1996, 7, 1–29; Bradeen 1975 [1960], 405; Rhodes 1994, 566, 573.

could continue to play a significant role in the legislative and judicial aspects of government in the Greek city in the Hellenistic and Roman eras, despite the prominence of the wealthy in civic affairs and in the civic Councils (*boulai*)<sup>16</sup>. Guy MacLean Rogers and Mitchell also question the commonly stated view that in the Roman era the council completely usurped the role of the People to such an extent that the latter institution possessed very little (if any) real power, being reduced to simply approving the lists of candidates for office.<sup>17</sup> Further below I discuss primary evidence that members of associations, including artisans and traders, could be citizens involved in the activities of the civic assemblies. Participation in associations did not necessarily reflect a compensation for lack of political or other participation within civic structures.

A second theoretical caution concerns the manner in which scholars emplot cultural and religious developments within a narrative framework of decline. One often hears of the degeneration in traditional religious life which accompanied the supposed deterioration of the *polis*. Simon Price (1984, 14) challenges this “conventional model, which has been applied to both Greek and Roman cults, [that] posits an early apogee followed by a long and continuous decline, until the last embers were extinguished by Christianity.” Some important studies of civic religious life from those of Johanness Geffcken in 1920 (1978) to those of Ramsay MacMullen (1981), Robin Lane Fox (1986), and Price (1999) interpret the evidence quite differently. Moreover, far from showing signs of deathly illness in the third century BCE, the weight of the evidence demonstrates that Greco-Roman cults—“traditional” and otherwise—thrived at least into the third century CE, even though there were certainly changes and differences from one region to another.

Robert Parker’s recent study of *Athenian Religion* (1996) in the classical and Hellenistic periods specifically is worth mentioning in this connection. Parker’s case study of Athens convincingly argues that scholars have exaggerated the contrast between the classical era and the Hellenistic era with regard to the supposed decline of religion, and he also issues extreme caution in the use of the “private” vs. “public” distinction in the study of ancient religion (Parker 1996, 4–7). Instead, he argues, there were considerable *continuities* over a broad span of time (from the archaic to the Hellenistic periods and beyond) in cultic life at this locale, despite areas of development.<sup>18</sup> Most interestingly for us here, Parker seriously qualifies the widespread notion that associations were a completely new and “distinctively Hellenistic phenomenon, a symptom of the collapse of the *polis* as organizing centre of religious life.”<sup>19</sup>

The third century BCE certainly witnessed an expansion of non-citizen groups or associations of foreigners at Athens (as Parker points out) and the evidence for occupational guilds specifically in the classical era is meager, at best. But the very partial nature of our evidence for associations in the classical era—which is only beginning to be fully addressed—should steer us away from making clear-cut statements of fundamental disjuncture with regard to the nature of associative life generally, or from asserting that the phenomenon of associations was completely “new” or “late.”<sup>20</sup>

16 Gruen 1993, 354. Cf. Quaß 1993, 361–62.

17 Rogers 1992 and Mitchell 1993, 1.201–204, arguing against Jones (1940, 177) and Magie (1950, 640–41).

18 Parker 1996, 256. Cf. Price 1999, 7–8.

19 Parker 1996, 333, 333–42. Contrast Nicholas F. Jones 1999, 4–7, 307–310.

20 On the classical era, see also Calhoun 1913; Ferguson and Nock 1944; Fisher 1988a; Arnaoutoglou 1994; Nicholas F. Jones 1995, 1999.



Moreover, as I discuss below, the “epigraphic habit” (the practice of monumentalizing) was of increasing importance in the Hellenistic and, especially, Roman eras (more so than the classical era). This means that the inscriptional record (including evidence for associations) swells as a result. This should caution us in too readily assuming, as does Nicholas F. Jones (1999, 307), that “the production of inscriptions is a reliable index of [associational] activity” when comparing different periods of history. Nor should we presume that the number of associations attested in surviving evidence for a particular place and time (e.g. the meager evidence for the classical era, especially outside of Athens) is necessarily an accurate measure of the nature and importance of associative life.

A further problem is that the traditional view of religious decline and the rise of associations sometimes reflects an anachronistic approach which reads history through the lenses of subsequent developments. The civic cults of “paganism” did eventually lose out to the adopted religion of empire, Christianity. So, according to this view, such traditional cults must have been inadequate in addressing the needs of people and were inevitably declining long before. Any activity during this age of decline which can be interpreted as “personal” or individualistic religion involving genuine feelings or notions of salvation (especially the mysteries)—that is, as approaching what such scholars understand Christianity to have been—is viewed as more vital or superior to other traditional forms of religious life.<sup>21</sup> Groups devoted to the mysteries and any other associations that closely approximate the small-group settings of Christian congregations are in some sense preparatory for the success of Christianity from this problematic perspective. Scholars who hold similar views stop short of explicitly stating, as G. H. Box (1929, 45) does, that the mysteries “and the religious brotherhoods which made purity of life a condition of membership are genuine manifestations of the religious spirit, and may be regarded as a *real preparation for Christianity*.” Giulia Sfameni Gasparro and Jonathan Z. Smith correctly question such Christianizing interpretations of the mysteries, interpretations which were previously so prevalent within scholarship.<sup>22</sup>

A third theoretical problem relates to the imposition of concepts and models of historical development borrowed from the modern era which distort our perspectives on the ancient world, including notions of “private religion” and “individualism.” Nilsson, Festugière, and Dodds claim to find in the Hellenistic age the rise of “individualism” and corresponding feelings of detachment, loneliness, and uncertainty. However, a developed concept of “individualism” (and related concepts of “private” vs. “public”) did not emerge until the sixteenth century and only fully developed during the Enlightenment. These concepts are less than adequate in studying pre-modern societies like the Greco-Roman world, which was very much collectivistic. The developments which Ferguson, Festugière, Dodds, and others claim to find in the ancient world and emphasize most are precisely those which came, to some degree, a millennium and a half later with the impact of modern individualism and the Enlightenment: the individual’s detachment from the larger community, freedom of choice, cultural mobility, critique of traditional forms of religion and the tendency to

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21 Festugière’s notion of personal religion closely resembles William James’ definition of religion as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (James 1963 [1902], 50; cf. Festugière 1954, 1–4; Dodds 1959, 243 and 1965, 2; Nilsson 1961, 711–12; Green 1990, 588).

22 Gasparro 1985, xiii–xxiii; Smith 1990.

privatized religion.<sup>23</sup>

Even without the concept of “individualism” there are difficulties with the social and religious conditions presupposed for this period. Louis Robert, Paul Veyne, Peter Brown, and others challenge notions of widespread rootlessness in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>24</sup> As Brown (1978, 2-3) observes,

many modern accounts of religious evolution of the Roman world place great emphasis on the *malaise* of life in great cities in Hellenistic and Roman times. Yet the loneliness of the great city and the rapid deculturation of immigrants from traditionalist areas are modern ills: they should not be overworked as explanatory devices for the society we are studying. We can be far from certain that [as Dodds states] ‘such loneliness must have been felt by millions . . .’

There is truth in the observation that associations could provide their members with things they might not otherwise get in precisely the same way elsewhere. However, we should not speak of widespread feelings of economic, religious or social deprivation (e.g. exploitation, alienation, loneliness) as the principal factor or as the cause of the association phenomenon in antiquity. As Stephen G. Wilson (1996, 14) also observes, it would be “a mistake to suppose that the motive for joining these groups was always compensatory, making up for something otherwise lacking in family or political life.”

It is worth saying a few words here about how these problematic notions of *deprivation* relate to debates within the social sciences. The notion that associations were a response to social deprivations has some affinities with previously common approaches to studying social and religious movements within the Social Sciences (especially in connection with the concept of “relative deprivation”). In the past, some sociologists attempting to explain the emergence of new groups within modern society have suggested that there is a direct causal relation between pre-existing feelings of deprivation (economic, social or otherwise) and the formation and success of social or religious movements. Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark’s earlier work, for instance, suggests that felt deprivation is a “necessary precondition for the rise of any organized social movement, whether it be religious or secular,” and that the emergent group then acts to “compensate for feelings of deprivation.”<sup>25</sup> In this view, new religious groups, like associations within the decline-theory, “function to provide individuals with a source of gratification which they cannot find in the society-at-large” (Glock and Stark 1965, 256). However, since the 1970s many social scientists have leveled criticisms against or made qualifications regarding this theoretical framework. Joan Neff Gurney and Kathleen J. Tierney’s (1982, 33) survey of research suggests that “the relative deprivation perspective is itself affected by too many serious conceptual, theoretical, and empirical weaknesses to be useful in accounting for the emergence and

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23 Cf. Hazelrigg 1992.

24 Jonathan Barnes’ (1988, 365) aptly comments that “life in Hellenistic Greece was no more upsetting, no more at the mercy of fickle fortune or malign foes, than it had been in an earlier era.” Paul Veyne (1990 [1976], 41) states that, “as Louis Robert has taught us, it must *not* be said that the Hellenistic epoch was the era of individualism or of universalism, and that its people felt lost within kingdoms that were too big.”

25 Glock and Stark 1965, 249. Cf. Aberle 1970.

development of social movements.”<sup>26</sup>

Evidently, theories which have been offered to explain relationships between associations and the Greek city in terms of decline are problematic in several respects. These theories should be left aside if we hope to gain a better understanding of the place of social and cultural phenomena such as associations within ancient societies. Yet the most fundamental problem with the notion that associations were symptoms of decline is the primary evidence regarding the actual relations between such groups and the city, which I fully address below. First, a few words are in order about the nature of the Greek city in Roman Asia, about the civic framework within which associations, Judean synagogues, and Christian congregations found themselves.

### The Civic Framework and Social Networks of Benefaction

There are significant *continuities* with regard to the political, social and cultural institutions of the Greek city (*polis*) from the classical period into the Hellenistic and Roman eras. Institutions such as theaters, market-places, and stadia remained prominent into the Roman era. The constitution of cities in Asia Minor founded on the model of the Hellenic *polis* still consisted of the two main bodies of civic authority, the Council (*boulē*), which usually numbered between two and five hundred members, and the People (*dēmos*). The People (as an institution) consisted of the citizen body (men only), often divided according to tribes (*phylai*).

Yet one of the most significant developments in the structures of the *polis* in the late-Hellenistic and Roman eras pertains to the emergence of a *systematic* pattern of benefaction (“euergetism”) which functioned by means of social networks and entailed particular, developing cultural world view. By the time the regions of western Asia Minor were incorporated into the Roman province of Asia (ca. 133 BCE), this system of benefaction—an elaboration of conventions which characterized Greek society in earlier times—had become an important structural element with special relevance to the social and economic well-being of the city.<sup>27</sup> Integral to this system of relations were the pursuit of honor (*timē*) and the avoidance of shame (*aischynē*), which were central cultural values in the ancient Mediterranean, values also shared by both Judeans and Christians.<sup>28</sup> This system involved reciprocal relations within networks marked by a clearly differentiated hierarchy. The most prominent characteristic of these relations was the exchange of benefits or gifts of numerous kinds (protection, financial contributions for various purposes, legal or other assistance) in return for appropriate honors. Relations were reciprocal in the sense that both the benefactor and the beneficiary (gods, individuals, groups, or institutions) had something to gain from the exchange, whether tangible or otherwise. The system was also self-perpetuating in that a benefaction was followed by fitting honors in return. Honors would then ensure the probability of further benefactions from the same source in the future, as well as benefactions from others who might seek to outdo competitors in the pursuit of honor.

The definition of appropriate honors depended both on the benefits conferred and on the

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26 For sociological critiques of relative deprivation, see Wallis 1975; Beckford 1975, 153–59; Berquist 1995.

27 For discussion of honors and benefaction, see Veyne 1990 [1976], 1987 [1985], 95–115; Gauthier 1985, 1993; Wallace-Hadrill 1990, 150–54; Mitchell 1993, 1.210; Sartre 1991, 147–166; Lendon 1997.

28 Cf. Malina 1981; Elliott 1993, 1995.

positions of the benefactor and the beneficiary within the overall hierarchy of relations. Failure to fittingly honor a benefactor resulted in shame (*aischynē*), and this might be viewed as analogous to impiety (*asebeia*) towards the gods (the ultimate benefactors), as Dio of Prusa suggests (cf. *Orations* 31.57, 65, 80–81, 157). Correspondingly, failure of wealthier persons to appropriately provide benefactions was a threat to the position and status they strove to maintain within society. In this sense, benefaction became a duty or obligation, not simply a voluntary action. The provision of benefactions and granting of honors reaffirmed the relative positions of the benefactor and beneficiary within the social system and hierarchy of the city and cosmos.

According to this world view, gods and rulers, whose ongoing protection and benefaction ensured the well-being of the civic community and its constituent groups, were at the top of this hierarchy as powers external to the city. The deities' protection of the city and its inhabitants, holding off earthquakes, famine, and other natural disasters and providing safety, stability, and peace (cf. Dio, *Orations* 38.20), was deserving of the utmost honors, including animal sacrifice. By the Roman era, in the Greek East the emperor's relation to the city was more often than not considered parallel to that between gods and the city. Rulers whose beneficence and insurance of stability was comparable to the gods likewise became deserving of sacrifices and related honors. As Aristides of Smyrna states, "there is no reproach in writing to [the emperor] in the same fashion in which we address the gods" (*Orations* 19.5; cf. Artemidoros, *Dream Interpretations* 3.13; Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 32.26). The massive building programs in the cities which accompanied and followed the establishment of the principate were perhaps the most conspicuous evidence of the apparent beneficence of the distant emperors. The imperial presence marked the architectural landscape of the cities in Asia under Roman rule.<sup>29</sup>

Yet those scholars who cite cultic honors for (or worship of) rulers as the epitome of the failure of the city, as a sign of the utter debasement of its ideals and values, fundamentally misunderstand the meaning and function of such honorary activities within society of the time.<sup>30</sup> Instead, as I elaborate in part two, the integration of emperors within the framework of the civic social system and ideological framework actually served to reinforce the ideals, values, and structures of the city, rather than to undermine them.<sup>31</sup> What this incorporation of the emperors also means is that, as Fergus Millar (1993) stresses, the relation to the emperor was very much a part of what the city *was* in Roman times.

The gods and emperors may have been at the top of the networks of benefaction rested, but they were certainly not the only important players. Imperial officials in the provinces also held an important position in this hierarchy. The local aristocracy, the institutions of the city, and other groups (including associations) were sure to maintain contacts with these powerful figures within social networks (see part two).

Perhaps more important for the everyday life of the average city, wealthy individuals or groups in the cities were expected to provide services and benefactions for the well-being of the city and its inhabitants as a matter of course. Such contributions could take the form of official civic positions (liturgies or magistracies) which required considerable financial output. Apart from these

29 See Price 1984, 249–74 for a catalogue of imperial structures. Cf. Rogers 1991, 128–135; Friesen 1993.

30 Cf. Friesen 1993; Price 1984.

31 Cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1990, 152–53; Price 1984; Smith 1987.

official roles, inhabitants could also make benefactions in the form of financial contributions for the establishment of buildings, festivals, statues, and other structures which were often dedicated in honor of the city, gods or emperors. Benefactions could also take the form of banquets or food distributions in times of famine, as when a wealthy woman named Atalante made such provisions for the inhabitants at Termessos in Pamphylia (*TAM III* 4, *TAM III* 62). The beneficiaries of such actions were expected to reciprocate with appropriate honors, such as the erection of an inscription of gratitude or another monument or statue in honor of the benefactor. Gratitude for a festival could be shown in less tangible ways as Petronius sums up: “He gave me a spectacle, but I applauded it. We’re even: one hand washes the other” (cited in Veyne 1987, 113).

This leads to the question of what prompted such contributions, thereby ensuring the stability of this systematic pattern of benefactions. Motivations may have differed from one person to the next and depended on the situation, but three main factors stand out in explaining why such benefactions were made. First, there is no reason to discount the role of genuine feelings of civic pride—often expressed using the title “friend of the homeland” (*philopatris*)—in many such benefactions. Second, honor in and of itself was highly valued in this culture, and the pursuit or love of honor (*philotimia*) was a positive virtue, to say the least. As well, the desire to have one’s benefactions or deeds remembered after death, to preserve one’s reputation for posterity, also played a role. As Dio of Prusa puts it, “many in time past have even given up their lives just in order that they might get a statue and have their name announced by the herald or receive some other honor and leave a succeeding generation a fair name and remembrance of themselves” (*Orations* 31.16 [LCL]; cf. Polybius, *The Histories* 20.6.5–6).

A third motivating factor must not be forgotten, however: fear of what might happen if conspicuous contributions were not made. Cultural values of the day virtually made such benefactions a duty. Failure to meet expectations, especially at critical times, could result in shame and, more concretely, angry mobs seeking revenge against wealthier inhabitants. It was at times of food shortage that the socioeconomic inequalities between the upper and lower strata of the population, sometimes lying dormant, could manifest themselves in social unrest or open conflicts. The food shortage at Prusa in Bithynia in the late-first century led crowds of rioting inhabitants to attempt a siege on the houses of wealthier inhabitants, Dio and his neighbor included, who were thought to be hoarding grain (*Orations* 46). According to Philostratus (*Life of Apollonios* 1.15), a similar situation happened at Aspendos in Pamphylia when the corn-dealers there, who were considered among the powerful (*dynatoi*), were suspected of hoarding grain during a famine in the time of Tiberius. Hungry, rioting crowds directed their anger at the leading civic magistrate, who sought refuge from their plans to burn him alive by “clinging to the statues of the emperor.” Publicized contributions by the wealthy helped to ensure the maintenance of a wealthy person’s position and prestige within the city, while also staving off the potential for such conflicts.

It is not hard to see how both competition and cooperation played an important role within this social system, and associations were participants within this, as I explore more fully in another article.<sup>32</sup> Competition for preeminence among the prominent families was matched by competition among the potential recipients of such benefactions. The constituent groups of the city were in

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32 See Harland 2009, 145–160, which further develops Harland 2005.

many ways competitors with one another in their attempts to maintain contacts with and receive ongoing support from influential persons. Beneficiaries also had something to gain from publicly advertising their connections in the form of an honorary monument: the advantage that such contacts accrued to them in their competition for prestige and influence within the civic community. In setting up an honorary inscription, an association or guild was not only praising the benefactor; the group was also making a claim regarding its own place within society, reaffirming its ties within the networks of the city in a very concrete way (cf. Woolf 1996, 29).

Cooperation was essential to this system, too. Individual inhabitants of the non-elite social strata—a purple-dyer on her own, for instance—were far less likely, if at all, to gain the attention and benefaction of an imperial or civic official. By cooperating together in the form of an association, the united purple-dyers could ensure the possibility of such relations in the city and empire. Within the wider world, a sense of civic pride and identity meant that the inhabitants of the city as a whole, including constituent groups such as associations and guilds, cooperated together within the larger arena of competition and rivalry with other cities (cf. Dio, *Orations* 38–39; Tacitus, *Annals* 14.17).

### Associations as Participants in Civic Vitality

Primary evidence concerning associations and the city speaks strongly against the notion that these groups were symptoms of decline. Many of these small groups represent the non-elite strata of society which so many scholars who hold the decline theory see as most removed from civic identity and participation. Strong feelings of civic pride and identity in relation to the city or “homeland” (*patris*) are clearly evident among associations and their members, as was also the case with elite authors.<sup>33</sup> There is substantial evidence for the participation of associations and their members within several areas of urban life, including political structures, networks of benefaction, and other sociocultural structures.

#### 1. *Participation in Political Life*

A discussion of citizenship will provide a framework for considering the potential participation of members of associations within political structures, further challenging the notion that guilds or associations were necessarily substitutes for membership in the city. Our knowledge of demography and of citizenship specifically is in many respects meager for the cities of Roman Asia Minor, but some general remarks can be made.<sup>34</sup> Officially, only citizens (*politai*) had civic rights as members of the People (*dēmos*), participating in the governance of the Greek city through the assembly (*ekklēsia*). Citizenship and considerable wealth were required in order to assume civic offices or membership in the council (*boulē*). Citizenship was generally limited to native-born men

33 Aristides of Smyrna, *Orations* 17.8; 18, 19, 20; Dio of Prusa, *Orations* 44; Artemidoros of Daldis, *Dream Interpretations* 3.66; Strabo of Amaseia, *Geography* 12.3.39, 12.3.15.

34 Most studies of citizenship focus on classical Athens because our evidence is more extensive for that time and place: Thomas 1981, 47–48; Sinclair 1988, 24–34; Whitehead 1991 (cf. Aristotle, *On Politics* 3.1–5). On Hellenistic and Roman times see, for example, A.H.M. Jones 1940, 160–62, 172–73; Magie 1950; Sartre 1991, 126–33.

of non-servile status; women and slaves were excluded. We know very little concerning freed-persons (ex-slaves), but there are some cases involving a freed-person who achieved citizenship, as well as important civic positions (e.g. C. Julius Zoilus at Aphrodisias; see Reynolds 1982, 156–64). A very clear distinction was made between the rural dwellers of the surrounding countryside (*chōra*), who were not citizens, and urbanites who were.

In some respects, notions of citizenship became somewhat less restricted in the Roman imperial era. It became quite common for a city to confer citizenship as a means of honoring outsiders, especially distinguished performers and athletes. So there were many instances of persons holding citizenship in more than one Greek city and some cases of wealthier individuals with membership on more than one civic Council in Asia Minor.<sup>35</sup>

Immigrants or resident foreigners *as groups*, at least, were normally excluded from citizenship. This is partially why some scholars view membership in ethnic or immigrant associations as a substitute for membership in the city in the Hellenistic and Roman eras. P. M. Fraser (1977, 60), for instance, states the following concerning these associations of foreigners in Hellenistic Rhodes: with their grandiloquent titles, their own magistrates, priesthoods, assemblies, cults, and social services, they provided foreign residents . . . with the same type of social environment, the same modes of advancement, and the same opportunities for lavish benefactions, as were provided by the civic organization for Rhodian demesmen [members of a subdivision of citizens], who themselves rarely, if ever, belonged to [associations]. They were, so to speak, a microcosm of the state, and loyalty that they evoked in their members was rewarded with honors similar to those awarded by the state.

There is some truth in the suggestion that immigrant associations offered their members what was not totally accessible to them within the city due to lack of citizenship. It is also certainly true that these associations reflect and replicate the conventions and values of the urban community.

Yet several qualifications regarding this view need to be made. There were cases when particular resident foreigners, especially wealthier benefactors, were granted citizenship. A decree of the assembly of Aspendos (probably from the early third century BCE) involved the grant of citizenship and membership in the civic tribes to men of various ethnic or geographic origins (see Magie 1950, 263, 1135 n.9). We simply do not know whether or when non-elite immigrants acquired citizenship in their city of residence in Asia Minor in the Roman era. Furthermore, even non-citizen foreigners could participate within the sociocultural activities of the civic community. Ethnic associations and their members could quite often find their city of residence to be a home, regardless of whether they were actual citizens participating in the assembly of the People (now see Harland 2009, 99–122). Inscriptional evidence discussed in the sections below concerning other areas of involvement by associations of immigrant Romans, Judeans, and others further confirms this.

Even more problematic is the suggestion that *occupational* associations were, in some sense, substitutes for political participation in the city, namely, that guilds were replacements for active membership in the citizen body and the assembly. A central issue in this regard pertains to whether

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35 For multiple citizenships, see *IGR* IV 160, 162, 1272, 1344, 1419, 1519; *TAM* II 585; Magie 1950, 640, 1503–1504 n.27. For multiple memberships in civic Councils, see *IGR* IV 1761; *MAMA* VIII 421, lines 40–45; Pliny, *Epistles* 10.14.



or not the members of guilds, especially artisans and traders, were usually citizens who participated in the civic assemblies.

Some scholars tend towards the view that many members of guilds were commonly *excluded* from citizenship and participation in the life of the city.<sup>36</sup> C. P. Jones (1978, 81), for instance, cites the case of the linen-workers at Tarsos as representative of the situation in many other cities of the Greco-Roman era. For Jones, the passage from Dio's speech to the Tarsians "illustrates a less well known feature of Greek city life, the restriction of full citizenship to those of at least moderate wealth [i.e. those who could pay 500 drachmae]. . . . It must have excluded an ordinary artisan from citizenship."<sup>37</sup> The reference to 500 drachmae in Dio's oration need not be interpreted this way even for Tarsos. More importantly, though, Jones' and Moses I. Finley's suggestion that the linen-workers' situation is representative of the circumstances in most cities does not adequately account for Dio's overall approach to the case.<sup>38</sup>

In his speech delivered to the citizens at Tarsos, Dio of Prusa addresses several problems of discord, including divisions between the Council and the People and between the organizations of elders and of youths. He then goes on to another perceived problem involving the exclusion of certain artisans from participation in the city:

there is a significantly sized group which is, as it were, left outside the body of citizens. Some call them "linen-workers" (*linourgoi*). Now sometimes the citizens are irritated by them and assert that they are a useless rabble and responsible for tumult and disorder in Tarsos. Yet at other times they regard them as a part of the city and hold the opposite opinion of them. Well, if you regard them as instigators of insurrection and confusion, you should expel them completely and not admit them to the civic assemblies. But if, on the other hand, you regard them as being in some sense citizens, not only because they are resident in Tarsos but also because in most instances they were born here and know no other city, then it is not appropriate to dishonor them or exclude them. . . . I call on you to enroll them all as citizens . . . and not to reproach them or cast them off, but rather to regard them as members of your body politic, as in fact they are. . . . If a man works with linen, it cannot be that he is inferior to his neighbor and deserves to have his occupation reproached and reviled while, if he is a dyer (*bapheus*) or a leather-cutter (*skytotomos*) or a carpenter (*tektōn*), it is not appropriate to reproach these occupations (*Orations* 34.21-23 = *AGRW* L11).

Dio goes on to point out the irony in the fact that the Tarsians would readily accept foreigners as citizens upon payment of a fee of 500 drachmae while excluding from the citizen body some members of guilds who had actually been born in Tarsos (and whose fathers and forefathers had been as well).

As Maurice Sartre argues, the exclusion of the linen-workers from participation in the citizen body at Tarsos stems from issues other than simply the fact that they were artisans or that they could not afford to pay an entrance fee for citizenship.<sup>39</sup> Most importantly for present purposes,

36 See, for instance, Jones 1978, 80-81; Finley 1984 [1973], 136-38; Rogers 1991, 71-72.

37 Jones (1978, 80-81, 183-84 n.77) does, however, correctly argue against the view that "linen-workers" is a general term for the lower classes here (as suggested by Broughton 1938, 844).

38 Finley's 1984 [1973], 136. See Sartre 1991, 128-29; Quaß 1993, 355-56; Nijf 1997, 18-20.

39 Sartre 1991, 128-29. Cf. Quaß 1993, 355-56.

Dio's overall approach to the exclusion of linen-workers, arguing that they should be included, suggests that it was *not* normal practice within cities in Asia Minor to exclude artisans or others of similar occupations from participation in the civic assembly. Dio sees this situation as an anomaly caused by the specific troubles and discord at Tarsos. Further on he refers to the fact that even at Tarsos artisans of other occupations—dyers (*bapheis*), leather-workers (*skytotomoi*) or carpenters (*tektones*), for instance—were *not excluded* in the same way. We simply do not know why the linen-workers were excluded here, but this passage is far from suggesting that such exclusion was common within cities of Asia Minor. In contrast to their counterparts at Tarsos, the guild of linen-workers (*linourgoi*) at Saittai were apparently included within the citizen body, perhaps even forming one of the tribes (see Kolb 1990), as was the case with guilds at Philadelphia.

It seems that (native- and free-born male) artisans and those of other occupations usually did possess citizenship and participate in the assemblies, sometimes playing significant roles.<sup>40</sup> This was the situation that Cicero has in mind when, in defending Flaccus, he complained that the political assemblies in Asian cities (like Pergamon and Tralles) were dominated by the mob and the “dregs” of society, by cobblers, belt-makers, craftsmen, and shopkeepers (*sutores, zonarii, opifices, tabernarii*; *For Flaccus* 17–19, 52–61). Similarly, Strabo relates the case of Hybreas at Mylasa, who, although of humble origins, achieved local prestige including the position of market-overseer (*agoranomos*). The growth of his power in the city is attributed, in part, to his relations with “the people of the market” (*hoi agoraioi*), namely, craftsmen, merchants, and traders (Strabo, *Geography* 14.2.24).<sup>41</sup>

Further evidence that guilds and their members (artisans, workers, merchants) were involved in the life of the city as citizens, and that the guilds were not a substitute for attachments to the civic institutions, comes from two cases of civic unrest at Ephesos. The author of Acts (19:23–41) describes the spontaneous gathering of silversmiths, craftsmen, and other workers (*argyrokopoi, techmitai, ergatai*) in the theater at Ephesos as an “assembly” (*ekklēsia*; vv. 32, 41), and those who attempt to resolve the problem address the gathering as the “People” (*dēmos*; v. 33). Furthermore, the account assumes that such craftsmen were citizens who could instead resolve such grievances within the structures of the regular assembly of the People (v. 39).<sup>42</sup> The second-century proconsular edict dealing with disturbances caused by bakers in the market-place of Ephesos likewise seems to presume that these workers were part of the citizen body with some influence on the activities of the institution of the People: “it sometimes happens that the People are exposed to disorder and confusion by the disreputable recklessness of the factions (or: riots; *staseis*) of bakers (*artokopoi*) in the market place” (*IEph* 215).

Some epigraphic evidence points to the importance of occupational associations within the actual civic organization in certain places in Asia Minor. The suggestion of W. M. Ramsay (1895–97, 105–106) and A. H. M. Jones (1940, 43–44, 162) that the citizen bodies of *many* cities in Lydia and Phrygia consisted of a “primitive” organization according to guilds, rather than regular tribes, is generally unsubstantiated. Subsequent epigraphic discoveries have shown that some cities formerly suggested as candidates (e.g. Akmonēia, Smyrna, and Hierapolis) were in fact organized according

40 See Quaß 1993, 355–65; Nijf 1997, 18–21.

41 Cf. Nijf 1997, 21, citing L. Robert

42 Cf. Quaß 1993, 358; Nijf 1997, 20–21.

to the usual tribal structure, not by occupational groups.<sup>43</sup> However, the case of Philadelphia remains. An inscription from that city (probably dating post-212 CE) involves honors granted to a benefactor named Aurelius Hermippos, who had served in important positions and had granted funds to several institutions, including the civic Council, the elders' organization, and the seven tribes (*phylai*). The monument itself was set up by a group that calls itself "the sacred tribe of wool-workers" (*IGLAM* 648 = *IGR* IV 1632). Another inscription from the same city involves a group called "the sacred tribe of leather-tanners" (*skyteis*; *IGLAM* 656). The social strata represented within the guilds were clearly active as citizens and it may be that some guilds at Philadelphia also functioned as civic tribes, at least by the third century.

It is quite common for scholars discussing the organization and activities of associations to observe that associations and guilds mimicked civic structures. Jean-Pierre Waltzing, for instance, states that associations were, in many ways, a "veritable city within the city."<sup>44</sup> So, for example, the internal organization of many associations and guilds mirrored civic organization, with common positions of leadership including secretary (*grammateus*), treasurer (*tamias*), president (*epistatēs*), and superintendent (*epimelētēs*). The terminology used for gatherings likewise reflected common civic terminology, including the use of the term "assembly" (*ekklēsia*) for certain gatherings (e.g. *IDelos* 1519, lines 1-2). Furthermore, the activities of associations reflected those of civic institutions: passing decrees, granting honors, voting on decisions, electing leaders, and engaging in the conventions of diplomacy, for instance.

Overall, in light of the discussion throughout this chapter, evidence of associations as cities writ small can be understood as a sign of the continuing vitality and influence of the city, not as a sign that associations were a substitute for declining participation in civic life. Close involvements in institutional and sociocultural structures of the city which did exist help to explain how civic structures came to influence the associations so heavily. Belonging within an association and belonging within the city were by no means mutually exclusive.

## 2. Participation in Social Networks of Benefaction

Some degree of involvement in the political structures of the city was by no means the only significant area of participation in society by members of many guilds and associations. There were other important ways in which associations *as groups* expressed belonging within and attachment to the city. Identification with the civic community could be expressed through involvement in benefactions for or dedications to the city or homeland (*patris*). The guild of silversmiths and goldsmiths at Smyrna expressed both its piety towards the goddess Athena and the civic pride of its members by repairing her statue "for the homeland" (*ISmyrna* 721; ca. 14-37 CE). And the dyers at Hierapolis who set up a statue of Lady "Council" (*boulē*) in personified form were identifying with this civic structure (*SEG* 41 [1991], no. 1201 = *AGRW* 147; ca. 100-150 CE). Several civic officials and some groups at Smyrna, including theologians, an association of hymn-singers, and a group of Judeans (see chapter seven), displayed civic-mindedness in joining together to provide financial

43 Cf. Nicholas E Jones 1987, 358, 381 n.6; Cohen 1995, 306-307.

44 Waltzing 1895-1900, 2.184. Cf. Foucart 1873, 50-51; Dill 1956 [1904], 269; Lane Fox 1986, 85.

donations for the city in the early-second century (*ISmyrna* 697 = *AGRW* 194; ca. 124 CE).

Immigrant or ethnic associations could also be involved in honorary activities which indicate attachments to the city of residence. At Perinthos (opposite Kyzikos) in Thracia, for instance, a man erected a pillar for the local Bacchic temple (Baccheion) of Asians, dedicating it on behalf of the emperors and, most importantly here, “the sacred Council and People of the Perinthians” (*IPerinthos* 56 = *AGRW* 64 ; ca. 196–98 CE).

Civic inhabitants, including associations, might also express their identification with the city by honoring an individual who demonstrated goodwill (*eunoia*) and acted as “benefactor of the homeland.”<sup>45</sup> An inscription from Smyrna, for example, involves the sacred synod (*synodos*) of performers and initiates of Dionysos Breseus honoring Marcus Aurelius Julianus, a civic crown-bearer, “leader of Asia” (Asiarch, probably a civic functionary),<sup>46</sup> temple-warden of the Augusti (*Sebastoi*) and benefactor, “because of his piety towards the god and his goodwill towards the city” (*ISmyrna* 639; mid-late II CE).

Perhaps even more telling is the cooperation between associations and important civic and imperial functionaries or institutions. There is abundant evidence for associations on their own honoring important civic officials, thereby maintaining connections with powerful citizens, as when the servants (*therapeutai*) of Zeus honored a “foremost leader of the city” for his piety towards the deity (*ISardBR* 22; ca. 100 BCE).<sup>47</sup> Associations also maintained important links with Roman officials of equestrian or senatorial rank (see part two). The connections of associations with both local and imperial functionaries attests to some ways these groups confirmed their relationship with the city, identifying with its interests.

There are numerous examples of all kinds of associations collaborating together with civic institutions, especially the Council and the People, in honoring eminent citizens or benefactors. This is true of ethnic associations. Associations of Romans throughout the cities of Asia commonly joined with the Council and the People in honoring civic functionaries and benefactors of their city of residence.<sup>48</sup> On more than one occasion the Council and the People of Lindos (on the island of Rhodes) joined together with associations, some of which were groups of foreigners (e.g. the Pergaians), to honor the priest of Athena Lindia and Zeus Poleus, protector of the city (*ILindos* 391, 392; time of Augustus). When a benefactor built or renovated the temple of Tyche at Perinthos, the Council and the People honored him with a monument; an association of Alexandrians also played a key role by setting up a statue in his honor (*IPerinthos* 27; cf. *IPerinthos* 28). Associations of

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45 Attaleia (*IGR* IV 1169: leather-workers); Hierapolis (*IHierapJ* 40, II–III CE: wool-cleaners); Miletos (*SEG* 36 [1986] nos. 1051–1055: linen-workers and sack-bearers devoted to Hermes); Temenothyrai (*AE* [1977], no. 802, late-I CE: clothing cleaners); Thyatira (*TAM* V 932, 933, 986, 989, 1098: slave-merchants; linen-workers; tanners; dyers; Juliasts); Tralles (*ITrall* 74, III CE: initiates).

46 There is some scholarly debate regarding the office of Asiarch. Some have suggested that this was a provincial functionary, a synonym for the high-priesthood of the provincial imperial cult. However, more recent scholarship convincingly argues that Asiarchs were likely civic (not provincial) functionaries, despite what the name may suggest (see Magie 1950, 449–50; Kearsley 1986, 1988, 1990).

47 Cf. *IEph* 425 (ca. 81–117 CE; silversmiths); *TAM* IV 33 (late I–II CE; shippers at Nikomedia); *TAM* V 955 (III CE; hymn-singers of the Mother of the gods).

48 Cf. *IAdramytt* 19, 21; *IPhyrgR* 533 (Akmoneia); *IAssos* 13–14, 19–21, 28; *IGR* IV 785–86, 788–91 (Apameia); *Ilasos* 90; *ITrall* 80.

immigrants could maintain such connections not only with their city of residence but also, of course, with their homeland, as the case of the Tyrians at Puteoli showed.

Occupational and other associations also joined with political institutions in honoring benefactors. The Council and the People at Smyrna joined with a synod of initiates in honoring two female theologians for their display of piety towards the goddess (probably Demeter or Kore) in providing their services at a festival by singing praises for the deity (*ISmyrna* 653 = *AGRW* 188; I-II CE; cf. *TAM V* 1098 = *AGRW* 130, from Thyatira). At Erythrai (west of Smyrna), the sacred theatrical synod joined with the “homeland” in honoring Antonia Tyrannis Juliane, the director of games devoted to Hadrian (*IErythrai* 60; 124 CE). Some associations even set up honors for a benefactor *on behalf of* the Council and the People, often in accordance with a specific provision in a decree or decision of the People.<sup>49</sup> At Ephesos, for example, “the Council and the People of the first and greatest metropolis of Asia . . . honored Publius Veditus Antoninus,” the civic secretary and ambassador to the emperors. Those “who are engaged in the taste” (perhaps a guild of wine-tasters) set up the statue (*IEph* 728 = *AGRW* 170; 160s CE).



Figure 23: Reserved seating for the “Judeans and god-fearers” in the theater at Miletos (*IMilet* 940).

### 3. Participation in Sociocultural Life

Attachment to civic institutions and an accompanying sense of civic identity or pride is evinced in other ways alongside involvement in civic structures and networks of benefaction. Among the principal sociocultural institutions of the Hellenized city were the market-places, baths, gymnasia, stadia, and theaters. Here too there was active participation by some associations and their members. Official age-based organizations of boys (*paides*) or girls, youths (*ephēboi*), young men

49 Cf. *IEph* 3079 (guilds); *IGR* IV 788-91 (guilds at Apameia); *IGR* IV 907 (leather-workers at Kibyra); Quandt 1913, 177 (initiates at Sardis); *ITrall* 74 (initiates).



(*neoi*), and elders (*gerontes*, *gerousia*) were a prominent feature of life in the gymnasia.<sup>50</sup> Guilds of Dionysiac performers and athletes devoted to Herakles were also active in the gymnasia, stadia, and theaters, competing during festivals held in honor of gods or emperors.



Figure 24: Reserved seating for the “emperor-loving goldsmiths” in the theater Miletos (*IMilet* 940).

for groups such as the “Judaean and God-fearers” (see figure 23), who sat just a few rows from the front, right next to the benches reserved for the “emperor-loving goldsmiths” (see figure 24; *IMilet* 940 = *AGRW* 183). The theater at Aphrodisias included reserved benches for the butchers alongside others, including special seating for Kolotron, the “head of the goldsmiths (*protaurarius*)” (see figure 25; *Iaph* 8).

Yet ordinary associations and guilds sometimes had a place (often in a literal sense) within these structures of the city. The stadia at Aphrodisias, Didyma (near Miletos), and Saittai, for instance, included bench-reservations for guilds and associations of various kinds (*Iaph* 10; *SEG* 40 (1990), no. 1063 = Kolb 1990). Several latrines at the Vedius bath-gymnasium complex at Ephesos were set aside for groups of bankers, hemp-workers, wool-dealers, and linen-weavers, who evidently frequented the place (*IEph* 454 = *AGRW* 172).<sup>51</sup> Various such groups could also have seats reserved for them in the theater where the assembly of the people, as well as theatrical and other performances, took place. The theater at Miletos included reservations

50 Cf. Forbes 1933; Jaczynowska 1978.

51 See also Yegül 1992, 217–19, on associations in North Africa.



Figure 25: Reserved seating for the “head of the goldsmiths” in the theater at Aphrodisias (IAph 8, Block J, 8, i).

Discussion of sociocultural institutions leads to another important aspect of the city and its cultural life: festivals, processions, and related activities in honor of the gods. Gods and rulers were an integral part of the relations and hierarchies which characterized the system of benefaction, as noted earlier. Festivals were one means to appropriately honor these “godly” benefactors who sat atop the web of networks and protected the city and its inhabitants. Plutarch, who was quite emphatic about the need for moderation in the pursuit of honor, felt that the best pretext for benefaction was one:

connected with the worship of a god [which] leads the people to piety. For at the same time there springs up in the minds of the masses a strong disposition to believe that the deity is great and majestic when they see the men whom they themselves honor and regard as great so liberally and zealously vying with each other in honoring the divinity (*Morals* 822b [LCL]).

The proliferation of associations of athletes and performers in the Hellenistic and Roman eras is just one clear indication of the continuing popularity and importance of festivals and the deities they honored.

There are clear signs of the continuing importance of the gods and goddesses of civic cults for the members of many associations, along with civic pride. The relation between the community and the gods was taken seriously, and any threat to this relationship was a grave offence. The Acts account of the silversmiths’ riot at Ephesus realistically portrays the attachment which inhabitants of a city, including the membership of guilds, felt for a patron deity (Acts 19:23–41). In this case, silversmiths and other craftsmen were involved in a disturbance not as a consequence of opposition to local structures or of being distanced from civic identity, but rather in defence of them. The more important of the motives Acts mentions relates to the need to appropriately honor the goddess: “there is danger . . . that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be scorned, and she will be deprived of her majesty that brought all Asia and the world to worship her” (19:27; cf. *IEph* 24 [ca. 160 CE]).



The official patron of a city was not the only deity to whom honor was due, however, as we saw in regard to the range of deities honored within associations. The foundation and continuation of associations or cults in honor of gods other than the city's patron deity could also be bound up in the identity and well-being of the civic community. The story of how Dionysiac societies (*thiasoi*) were introduced to Magnesia, which I have already mentioned, clearly shows this (*IMagnMai* 215 = *AGRW* 202). The well-being of the Magnesians, whose patron deity was Artemis Leukophryene, was also dependent upon the proper fulfillment of the wills of other gods, Apollo and Dionysos, who called for the foundation of associations and temples devoted to Dionysos. Those who belonged to a Magnesian Dionysiac association in the Roman era (whose leader set up this monument) evidently felt themselves to be part of this community and its history.

### Conclusion

Inscriptions from Asia Minor concretely illustrate the continuing importance of the *polis* (Greek city-state) and its structures as a locus of identity, cooperation, and competition for members of many associations and guilds, groups that reflect the social strata of society. Often these groups were participants in civic vitality, not symptoms of decline. They were not by definition inclined to be in opposition to the city or its structures.

Moreover, inhabitants who joined together on a regular basis to form associations could find the city to be a home. The level and nature of participation or identification within the civic community could vary from one association to the next, however. Each group could find its own individual way of living within the city despite commonalities with the ways of other associations. The involvement of associations in imperial dimensions of civic life, to which I now turn, was another factor involved in a group claiming its place within such a society.





## PART 2:

### IMPERIAL CULTS AND CONNECTIONS AMONG ASSOCIATIONS



## 4 / IMPERIAL GODS WITHIN ASSOCIATIONS

### Introduction

When it comes to assessing the relationship between associations and society—particularly imperial dimensions of society—scholars often stress tensions. One hears far more of group involvements in disturbances and strict controlling actions by imperial authorities than of the extensive evidence for associations’ participation in other imperial aspects of society and culture. The chapters that follow begin to correct the unbalanced picture of associations and society entailed in these common scholarly approaches. I do this by looking at evidence concerning the place of the emperors and imperial family within the internal ritual life of many associations (chapter four) and the involvements of associations in external relations with emperors and the imperial elites (chapter five).

So as to avoid pitfalls of previous scholarship, which has seen conflict and control as the starting point for understanding associations, I reserve my evaluation of civic disturbances and the intervention Roman authorities until the end of this part (chapter six). There I put this evidence of group-society tensions into perspective in light of ongoing positive interactions. Since most evidence for involvements in disturbances and imperial intervention pertains to the city of Rome or surrounding parts of Italy, this order of discussion will also prevent us being side-tracked from the principal focus on how associations actually functioned within Asia Minor.

Moreover, the evidence relating to cultic honors for the emperors and participation within social networks of benefaction helps to provide a clearer picture regarding the place of associations within culture in the Roman imperial era. It also provides an appropriate framework within which to compare the participation and non-participation of both Judean synagogues and Christian assemblies in imperial dimensions of civic life in the same region. By looking at manifestations of Roman imperialism within society, we are witnessing an important part of the world in which Judeans and Jesus-followers lived their lives.

The cultural landscape of Roman Asia Minor was permeated by festivals, rituals, and temples that included the emperors and imperial family – the *Sebastoi* in Greek, *Augusti* in Latin (here translated as “revered ones” and referred to as the “imperial gods”). And there are associations that reflect this cultural environment in their internal life. Alongside provincial and civic imperial cult institutions and temples stood unofficial (i.e. not established or financially supported by a state) forms of rituals in honor of the revered ones, some within smaller group settings. The evidence for these local associations throws into question many common scholarly views concerning rituals for the emperors as gods, or imperial cults. Overall, honors for these *Augustan* or *imperial gods* (as I call them for convenience here) could be a significant and integral part of group life, telling us something about the self-understanding of such groups and their place within society and the cosmos.<sup>1</sup> Insights from the social sciences and ritual studies will help us to evaluate the meaning of this evidence.

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1 See also Harland 1996 on Ephesos specifically. The present chapter is developed from Harland 2003b.

## The Case of Demeter-Devotees at Ephesos

An association of Demeter-devotees at Ephesos will serve as an entry into the issue of imperial cults and scholarly approaches to them. Unfortunately, we do not usually have sufficient evidence to discuss in any detail the general history of a particular association in a specific locality, let alone the place of the “revered ones” (*Sebastoi*) or imperial gods within that history. Often we are fortunate if we even have two or three extant, though incomplete, inscriptions pertaining to a particular group. So it is significant that in the case of the Demetriasts at Ephesos we at least get momentary glimpses of their history from the beginning of the first to the mid-second century of the common era. Two inscriptions reveal, among other things, the ongoing importance of the emperors or imperial family within the ritual life of this association.<sup>2</sup> The case of the Demetriasts, which is not isolated, suggests that imperial gods could be an important component in group practices and identities, revealing to us something about how members of such associations understood their places within society and the cosmos.

The earliest evidence we have for this group dates to the time of the emperor Tiberius, between 19 and 23 CE (*IEph* 4337 = *AGRW* 159).<sup>3</sup> The inscription, whose beginning is missing, preserves for us a decree of the Demetriasts concerning honors for particular benefactors who were also priests or priestesses. One of them, probably the man named Bassos, had assumed service positions (liturgies) associated with the management of the gymnasium and the night-watch, besides being priest of Artemis. In connection with the civic institutions’ acknowledgment of these services, the Demetriasts decided that they, too, would grant these persons special honors both for their contributions to the life of the city and for their good-will towards the association specifically. This group arranged to have images or statues of these benefactors made and set up in a prominent place.

What is especially significant for present purposes, however, are the imperial cult connections associated with the priesthoods of the honorees. Along with the priest of Artemis (named Bassos) is mentioned Proklos, who is called priest of the “new Dioskoroi,” the sons of Drusus Caesar (cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 2.84). There was evidently a cult devoted to the twin sons of Drusus Caesar and Livilla identifying them as the sons of Zeus, perhaps alongside other members of the imperial family identified as gods. The third honoree, Servilia Secunda, is referred to as the priestess of “Augusta (*Sebastē*) Demeter Karpophoros.” Here we have the Demetriasts honoring prominent persons who had assumed priesthoods associated with cults for the imperial family alongside traditional deities. More importantly here, the Demetriasts identify their own patron deity with a member of the imperial family, Augusta, most likely Livia Drusilla Augusta (the third wife of Augustus; see the portrait of Livia in figure 26). This suggests that rituals for such members of the imperial family were integrated within traditional practices for Demeter within the group.

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2 *IEph* 213, 4337. Cf. *IEph* 1210, 1270, 1595.

3 Keil 1928, 61–66. Cf. Oster 1990, 1671–73.





*Figure 26: Statue of the empress Livia as the goddess Fortuna from Pozzuoli near Naples (1 CE), now in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen.*

There are further indications that rites for members of the imperial family were an integral and ongoing part of the life and identity of this group at Ephesos. Another important inscription from the time of Domitian confirms this, and it is worthwhile quoting what has survived of this letter in full (*IEph* 213 = *AGRW* 163; ca. 88-89 CE):

To Lucius Mestrius Florus,<sup>4</sup> proconsul, from Lucius Pompeius Apollonios of Ephesos. Mysteries and sacrifices are performed each year in Ephesos, lord, to Demeter Karpophoros (“Fruit-Bringer”) and Thesmophoros (“Law-Bringer”) and to the Augustan (*Sebastoi*) gods by initiates (*mystai*) with great purity and lawful customs, together with the priestesses. For many years, these rites were protected by kings and emperors, as well as the proconsul of the period, as contained in their enclosed letters. Accordingly, as the mysteries are pressing upon us also during your time of office, through my agency the ones obligated to accomplish the mysteries necessarily petition you, lord, in order that, acknowledging their rights. . . (remainder missing).

4 On Florus, see *PIR*<sup>2</sup> M 531 and *IEph* 234, 2048.

It does not seem that this group is asking permission, as though the participants would otherwise be unable to engage in the celebration. Instead, the members are seeking the prestige which further acknowledgment by important officials could give to them. As G. H. R. Horsley also points out, the manner in which the association's representative addresses the proconsul and emphasizes the precedents for such recognition—even including copies of previous correspondence—would make it hard for the official to deny what they wanted (see *NewDocs* IV 22). After all, there was a long history of recognition by kings, emperors, and proconsuls long before Florus arrived on the scene during the time of Domitian.

The manner in which this history is cited suggests that rituals for imperial gods were not something new added to simply appease a Roman official. Instead, they were a continuation of the sort of practices hinted at in the inscription from the time of Tiberius. This group included “sacrifices and mysteries” not only dedicated to Demeter but also to the Augustan gods in one of its most important yearly celebrations, and there is no clear distinction made in the inscription between the godly recipients of these honors. The “revered ones” found themselves alongside the likes of Demeter in the realm of the gods. The offering of sacrifices “to” (using the dative in Greek)—not just “on behalf of” (ὑπέρ)—the emperors as gods was not at all limited to this particular association, we shall see. We can assume that customary banquets involving consumption of sacrificial food would follow when such offerings and sacrifices were made to these gods.

Also significant here is the incorporation of the imperial gods within the ritual life or mysteries of this group. Alongside the central ritual of sacrifice, mysteries were among the most respected and revered acts of piety in the Greco-Roman world. Few human actions so effectively maintained fitting relations between the realm of humans and the realm of the gods, ensuring benefaction, protection, and success for the individual or group in question. As an inscription from Kyme puts it, “those who take part in the mysteries, accomplishing and protecting them perpetually” could expect to “acquire accessible and fruitful land, the birth of legitimate children, and a share in all good things” (*IKyme* 37). Unfortunately, the inscription from Ephesos does not give us any information concerning the actual content of these imperial mysteries, so we are left wondering what exactly was entailed in the rituals. This gap in our knowledge about the precise nature of the mysteries and related rituals, though never completely filled, will diminish somewhat when we turn to other evidence for imperial mysteries further below. Contrary to what many scholars who adhere to the traditional paradigm of imperial cult would be inclined to assert, this example of imperial mysteries and sacrifices is *not* isolated. Rather, it is indicative of similar practices that were important within the internal life of other associations as well.

### Questioning a Tradition in Scholarship

When the influential scholar A. D. Nock (1972 [1930], 248) encounters this evidence for the Demetriasts he discounts it, stating that it “is hardly likely that the Emperor or the Empress identified with Demeter figures in the mysteries. . . . The promoters of a secret rite were perhaps eager to avoid any suspicion of cloaking disloyalty under secrecy.” M. P. Nilsson (1959) also briefly

considers evidence for rituals such as imperial mysteries within small-group settings, but he readily categorizes them as politically-motivated clichés or “pseudo-mysteries.”<sup>5</sup> Writing before both Nock and Nilsson, Franz Poland’s summary statement regarding associations specifically does not come as a surprise in light of commonly held assumptions within scholarship: “the cult of the emperors appears relatively seldom [within associations] and, where it does occur, has little independent meaning.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, he asserts, such cultic activities had little significance for an association’s “self-understanding” (Poland 1909, 532).

These assessments of imperial rituals within associations should be understood in relation to a common scholarly paradigm regarding imperial cults generally. The central conviction of the traditional view is that imperial cults were *not* well integrated within “religious” life. Rather, imperial cults were fundamentally different in kind from other cultic forms in the Greco-Roman world. Scholars such as Nock, Nilsson, G. W. Bowersock, and Paul Veyne emphasize that imperial cults were “political”, not “religious”, “public”, not “private”. According to Nilsson (1948, 178), imperial cult “lacked all genuine religious content.” The cult’s “meaning lay far more in state and social realms, where it served both to express loyalty to the rule of Rome and the emperor and to satisfy the ambition of the leading families.”<sup>7</sup> From this problematic viewpoint, imperial rituals were merely ceremony, “a purely mechanical exercise” which failed to evoke the feelings or emotions of the individuals who participated.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, no one actually believed that the emperors were gods, and this was reflected in the lack of any “private” forms of worship, such as votive offerings (reflecting prayers to the emperors) and mysteries.<sup>9</sup>

Underestimating the significance of imperial cults for the populace is partially the result of the imposition of modern viewpoints and assumptions onto ancient evidence. First, the traditional view reflects modern distinctions between politics and religion which, as Price also stresses, do not fit the ancient context, where the social, cultic, economic, and political were intricately interconnected and often inseparable. Second, the view involves the imposition of modern notions concerning “individualism,” “private” vs. “public” and related definitions of religion onto ancient evidence. Some influential modern definitions of religion—such as those offered by William James (1963 [1902], 50) and Rudolf Otto (1923)—stress *emotions* or *feelings* of the *individual* as the heart of religion, emphasizing an equation between “personal” or “private” and genuine religiosity, and there is a tendency among some scholars to apply this to antiquity, as we have seen in chapter two.<sup>10</sup> However, such individualistic and (sometimes) anti-ritualistic definitions of religion are problematic when applied to non-western (or even non-Protestant) phenomena, modern or ancient. Though there were certainly some cases when feelings regarding the gods were very strongly expressed by

5 Cf. Nilsson 1961, 370–71.

6 Poland 1909, 234–35 (trans. mine): “Auch sonst erscheint der Kaiserkult zunächst verhältnismäßig selten und, wo er auftritt, hat er wenig selbständige Bedeutung.”

7 Nilsson 1961, 385 (trans. mine): “Seine religiöse Bedeutung war nicht groß, mit einer Ausnahme, auf die wir zum Schluß zurückkommen; seine Bedeutung lag vielmehr auf staatlichem und sozialem Gebiete, wo er dazu diente, die Loyalität gegen das herrschende Rom und den Kaiser zur bezeugen und den Ehrgeiz der leitenden Familien zu befriedigen.” Cf. Bowersock 1965, 115 and 1983; Ste. Croix 1981, 394–95.

8 Fishwick 1978, 1252–53; cf. Veyne 1990 [1976], 315.

9 Cf. Nock 1935, 481; Bowersock 1973, 180, 206; Veyne 1990 [1976], 307; Fishwick 1978, 1251–53.

10 Cf. Festugière 1960, 1–4; Dodds 1959, 243; Dodds 1965, 2; Nilsson 1961, 711–12; Green 1990, 588.

individuals in antiquity (cf. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, book 11), the focus of attention was often on the performance of rituals within group or community settings in order to maintain fitting relations between communities and the gods rather than with the inner feelings of the individual. This does not make such activity any less “genuinely religious” within that context.

Even so, there is neglected evidence that imperial cults were important within contexts that many of these scholars would consider “private,” including prayer and the making of vows. So, for instance, a votive offering (*euchē*) for the “new god, Antinoos” (the favorite of Hadrian) was found at Claudopolis in Asia Minor (*IKlaudiop* 56; cf. Robert 1980, 133). Two other Greek votive inscriptions from the mid-first century—one from Ilion (*ILS* 2.8787) and the other from Aphrodisias—reflect thanks for the special protection or benefactions offered by imperial gods (see Friesen 2001, 117–20). Versnel (1981, 36–37) points out that the term *epēkoos*, “one whose nature is to hear,” which is often associated with prayer, could be attributed to emperors, and other sources point to the importance of prayer to the emperors.<sup>11</sup> As with statues of other gods, individuals could take refuge in times of trouble at the statues of emperors, and there are examples of persons leaving petitions at the feet of imperial statues.<sup>12</sup> But the most extensive and important neglected evidence for us here involves the activities of associations, particularly since these groups are often considered “private” by these scholars who deny the importance of the emperors in the “private” sphere.<sup>13</sup> But a few more general words about the problems with the traditional view are in order before analyzing the evidence for associations.

This scholarly view which emphasizes a fundamental difference between cults for emperors and those for other gods is not without opponents.<sup>14</sup> Fergus Millar’s (1973, 164) overall impression from the evidence is that imperial cults were not essentially different from other cults, but rather “fully and extensively integrated into the local cults of the provinces, with the consequence that the Emperors were the object of the same cult-acts as the other gods.” “Unless we deny the name ‘religion’ to all pagan cults,” he states, “our evidence compels us to grant it also to the Imperial cult” (Millar 1973, 148). H. W. Pleket’s article (1965) on the evidence for “imperial mysteries” draws attention to certain instances of what he would call genuine piety in relation to the emperors, to which I will return in connection with a group at Pergamon. Besides challenging common scholarly notions that the living emperors were *not* honored as gods at Rome and in the West, Ittai Gradel’s (2002) very important study also delves into substantial evidence for the importance of the emperor and imperial family within cultic life in households and other unofficial settings not funded by the state, including the *collegia* (although he does not explore the evidence for associations at length).

Turning to Asia Minor specifically, some important research on imperial cults in this region likewise provides an alternative understanding to that of the traditional paradigm. Studies by Simon Price (1984), Steven J. Friesen (1993) and Stephen Mitchell (1993, 1.100–117) point to the

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11 E.g. Aristides, *Orations* 26 and *ISardBR* 8.13–14. Cf. Price 1984, 232–33.

12 Cf. *POxy* 2130 [267 CE]; *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri* I 20 [ca. 250 CE]; *PLond* inv. no. 1589 [295 CE]; Alexander 1967, 31–32.

13 Cf. Santero 1983; Price 1984, 117–21; Friesen 2001, 116–121. For the involvement of households in royal sacrifices and other “private” dimensions of ruler cult in Hellenistic times at Ilion and in Egypt, see Robert 1966.

14 Cf. Robert 1960a, 321–24; Will 1960; Hopkins 1978; Momigliano 1987a.

integration of imperial cults within civic life in this region, with intertwined political, social, and cultic significance for different social strata of the population. And R. R. R. Smith's work on the symbolic significance of reliefs in the temple of the Augusti (*Sebastoi*) at Aphrodisias shows how emperors were "added to the old gods, not as successors or replacements, but as a new branch of the Olympian pantheon."<sup>15</sup> Although these scholars present compelling evidence with respect to the varied significance of imperial cults (beyond the political), they do not devote special attention to the inscriptional evidence for unofficial groups and associations specifically, to which I now return.<sup>16</sup>



Figure 27: Temple of Trajan at Pergamon.

### Rituals for the Imperial Gods (*Sebastoi*) within Associations

A closer look at associations in the Roman province of Asia reveals the integration of emperors and imperial cults within what we moderns tend to label "political", "social", and "religious" dimensions of life at the local level. This investigation will shed more light on both the nature of imperial cults and the self-understanding of associations.

A few words of introduction are in order concerning the forms that cults for the emperors took, so that we can place associations within this framework. From a modern scholarly perspective, it is helpful to distinguish between four levels of imperial cults. First, there was the official cult of *deceased* emperors centred at the city of Rome itself and influential within Italy and the West. At the death of popular emperors (but not those that gained the *damnatio memoriae* of the Roman senate), a special ceremony took place which involved the senate inducting the deceased emperor into the realm of the gods (sometimes discussed in terms of an "apotheosis" within scholarship). Some republican and Augustan traditions—at least at the official level—stopped short of "worshipping" a living emperor as a god. Yet it is important to highlight Gradel's recent work (2002), which has problematized an oversimplified contrast between the East, where *living* rulers clearly received treatment as gods (especially following Alexander the Great), and the West. Gradel

15 Smith 1987, 136. Cf. Reynolds 1981, 1986, 1996.

16 But do see Pleket 1965; Price 1984, 50 n.122, 85, 88, 90, 105, 118, 190–91.

shows that there is plenty of evidence from Rome and Italy for the worship of *living* emperors after all, particularly though not solely in local and unofficial settings.

Second, there were *provincial* imperial cults and temples organized by institutions that claimed to represent the civic communities of a given province. In the Roman province of Asia, this central organization was known as the “League (*koinon*) of Asia” or the “Greeks of Asia,” and the imperial cult temples founded by this organization were primarily under the direction of the “high-priests of Asia” (*archiereis Asias*). Similar organizations existed in provinces like Bithynia–Pontus and Galatia as well. Temples established by this provincial organization in the first century or so included those for the goddess Roma and god Augustus at Pergamon (founded 29 BCE), for Tiberius at Smyrna (23 CE), for Domitian at Ephesos (89 CE), and for Trajan at Pergamon (just before 113 CE).<sup>17</sup> The latter provincial temple at Pergamon (see figure 27) included cult statues of Trajan and of Zeus Philios (“Friendly”); later on, a statue of the emperor Hadrian was also placed within the sanctuary. This cult for Trajan was also quite typical of provincial imperial cults in the sense that there were regular festivals and games in honor of the emperor in connection with the temple (*CIL* III, supplement 7086). An influential benefactor of Pergamon, C. Antius Aulus Julius Quadratus, contributed a substantial amount of funds to establish these games, and we shall soon encounter this important imperial official in connection with associations. In Asia Minor, it became common in various contexts, including provincial cults, to refer to a given emperor as “god *Sebastos*,” and to refer to the emperors (and some other members of the imperial family) collectively as the “*Sebastoi* gods,” “the revered gods.”

Third, there were *civic* imperial cults which were devoted to honoring the imperial gods (or a particular emperor) and which maintained close connections with other institutions of the city (*polis*). These cults, which were established using donations from local benefactors or prominent families, could involve a newly built temple or could take place within existing civic buildings. A good example of such a civic temple is the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias (figure 28), which was dedicated to “Aphrodite, the Augustan (*Sebastoi*) gods, and the people” (Reynolds 1981, 318, no. 2) or, alternatively, to the “Olympian, Augustan (*Sebastoi*) gods.”<sup>18</sup> There were similar civic cults with their own priesthoods and other functionaries at other locales, including Akmoneia, Ephesos, and Laodicea. Civic and provincial imperial cults were not mutually exclusive. The same persons could serve as functionaries in either context or even both at the same time. Fourth, there were other *local* shrines, monuments and expressions of honor for the emperors as gods in unofficial settings (e.g. small groups, families, individuals), which brings us back to associations.

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17 On these provincial temples see, for instance, Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 51.20.6; Tacitus, *Annals* 4.37, 3.66–69; Price 1984. Friesen (1993) focuses on the temple for the Augusti (*Sebastoi*) at Ephesos.

18 See Smith 1987; Reynolds 1981, 1986, 1996.





*Figure 28: Temple of the Augusti (“Sebasteion”) at Aphrodisias.*

Despite the limitations of epigraphic sources, there is considerable evidence of imperial cult activities within associations of different types in Asia Minor. The nature and extent of these practices suggest that a similar range of activities probably took place within other associations about whom we happen to know far less. Overall, cultic honors for imperial gods (*Sebastoi*) could be a significant component in the internal life of associations, telling something to us about the self-understanding or identity of these groups, about how they understood their place within the framework of city, empire, and cosmos. Contrary to the traditional view within scholarship, such practices were not merely expressions of political loyalty. Rather, they were “religious” expressions in the same sense that one could speak of “religious” expressions towards the traditional gods, all of which were intertwined within social, political, and other dimensions of life in the Greek city in Asia Minor.

### *1. Official Settings*

Some associations could participate in official civic or provincial celebrations and festivals in honor of emperors from time to time without necessarily having been established and financially supported by civic or provincial institutions. It seems that such participation was primarily limited to organizations of the gymnasia and professional associations of performers devoted to Dionysos or



athletes devoted to Herakles.<sup>19</sup> Since these groups are not the primary focus of this book, an example will suffice. A decree of the world-wide Dionysiac performers found at Ankyra involves this group thanking a benefactor for his contributions to the “mystery” (*mystērion*) and for supplying funds for the performers’ competition in a “mystical contest” (*mystikos agōn*) involving sacred plays in honor of both Dionysos and Hadrian, the “new Dionysos” (*IAnkyraM 141*, lines 10–11, 20–25; see figure 29).<sup>20</sup>

Beyond these more officially recognized groups, there were other associations that sometimes participated within official imperial cults to some degree. We do not always have clear or sufficient evidence to establish the exact nature of a particular group. And this makes it hard to distinguish between unofficial associations that were occasionally involved in official events run by a city or province, on the one hand, and groups that were more along the lines of an established board or organization of a city that played an ongoing, financially-sponsored role within civic or provincial festivals or temple activities, on the other. Added to this methodological difficulty is the possibility that a group that initially formed apart from any civic institution or civic financial support could later come to develop closer ties with civic institutions and official activities sponsored by the *polis* in an ongoing way.

Some of the associations called “hymn-singers” (*hymnōdoi*) in Asia seem to provide an example of associations participating within certain officially recognized events run by the province or city, including events associated with imperial cult temples.<sup>21</sup> Hymn-singers dedicated to the imperial gods are attested in several places. At Ephesos, there seems to have been more than one group using

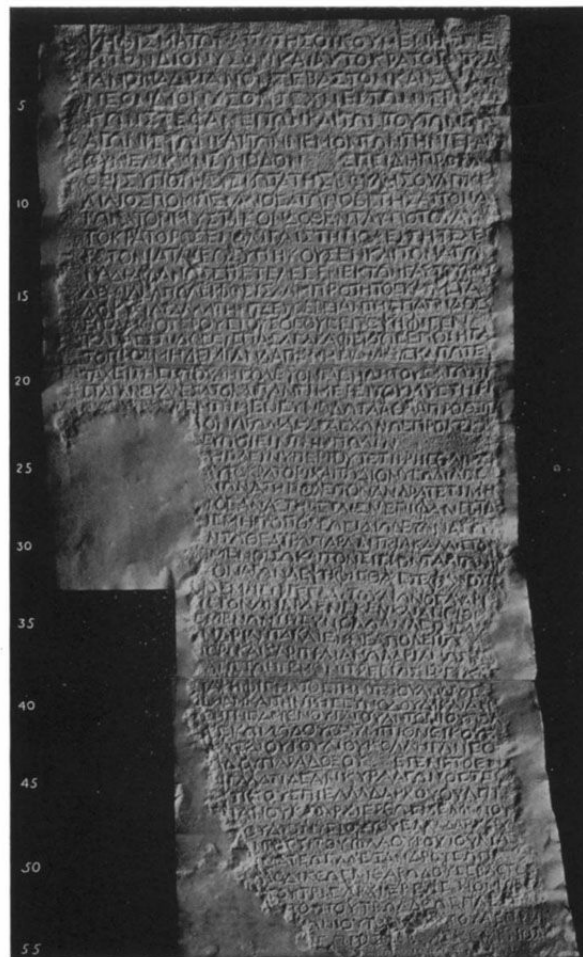


Figure 29: Image of a squeeze of the monument involving the “mystical contest” of the performers at Ankyra (*IAnkyraM 141*).

19 The procession established by Vibius Salutaris at Ephesos, for instance, involved the hymn-singers, the elders’ organization (*gerousia*), official boards connected with the Artemision, and, most importantly, the youths, who carried images of Artemis, the Ionian and Hellenistic founders, and the emperors (*IEph 27*; Rogers 1991). During the principate of Claudius, the responsibility of singing honors to the members of the imperial household at Ephesos’ civic celebrations, which had previously been performed by an association of hymn-singers there, was handed over to the youths (*IEph 18d.4–24*; cf. *IEph 1145*). Josephus refers to an official celebration of mysteries in honor of Caligula at Rome, when a choir of boys was brought in from Asia to sing (Josephus, *Antiquities* 19.30, 104).

20 See Buckler and Keil 1926. Cf. *IAnkyraBosch* 127, 129, 130.

21 Cf. Poland 1926; Friesen 2001, 104–116.

this self-designation, one being connected with a temple of Hadrian. At Smyrna, there were two groups by this name, one a sub-group of the elders' organization and the other calling itself “the fellow hymn-singers of god Hadrian,” a group which continued long after that emperor’s time.<sup>22</sup> Unlike associations of Dionysiac performers, however, it seems that these groups were not usually professionals.

We know of the group at Pergamon from several inscriptions of the first and early-second centuries. By the beginning of the second century, at least, the membership of the group consisted primarily if not solely of Roman citizens, some of whom were wealthy (*IPergamon* 374 = *AGRW* 117).<sup>23</sup> There is earlier evidence from the time of Claudius concerning the Pergamene and other hymn-singers (*IEph* 3801 = *AGRW* 160; see figure 30).<sup>24</sup> The first part of the inscription reveals that the hymn-singers had previously received a letter from Claudius himself acknowledging the decree which they had sent to him, probably honoring the imperial household (only the beginning is legible). They decided to monumentalize this instance of contact with an emperor.



Figure 30: Drawing of the monument from Hypaipa about hymn-singers containing the letter from Claudius and the decree of the provincial league (*IEph* 3801).

More importantly here, the second part of the monument preserves a document concerning a provincial celebration held at the temple of god Augustus and goddess Roma at Pergamon. It is a resolution of the provincial League of Asia, representing the Greek cities. The provincial League thanks the hymn-singers for their participation in celebrating the emperor’s birthday:

22 See the following: *IEph* 742, 921 (hymn-singers of Hadrian); *IEph* 645, 3247 (hymn-singers of Artemis); *IEph* 18d.4–24 (hymn-singers and ephebes; 44 CE); *ISmyrna* 595 (hymn-singers of Hadrian; ca. 200 CE), 697 (ca. 124 CE), 758; *ISmyrna* 644 (elders). Cf. Rogers 1991, 55, 76; Halfmann 1990 (Kyzikos); *IGR* IV 657 (Akmoneia); *IDidyma* 50; *IGBulg* 666–68 (“friends of the Augusti hymn-singers” at Nikopolis in Moesia).

23 One member named T. Claudius Procillianus had been a galatarch at Ankyra; a civic tribe there honored him as benefactor (*IAnkyraBosch* 142). His father, T. Claudius Bocchus (equestrian order), had served as a tribune in the army; he was also a high-priest and “revealer of Augustus” (*sebastophantēs*) in the provincial imperial cult of Galatia, as well as a member in an elite association or board called the “sacrificial priests” (*hierourgoi*) at Ankyra (*IAnkyraBosch* 98).

24 Cf. *IEph* 18d.4–24 (ca. 44 CE); Keil 1908; Buckler 1935.

Since it is proper to offer a visible exhibition of piety and of every intention befitting the sacred to the Augustan household each year, the hymn-singers from all Asia, coming together in Pergamon for the most sacred birthday of Augustus Tiberius Caesar, god, accomplish a magnificent work for the glory of the synod, singing hymns to the Augustan household, accomplishing sacrifices to the Augustan gods, leading festivals and banquets . . .

It seems that on some important occasions associations of hymn-singers from different cities of Asia, perhaps including some of those attested at Ephesos and Smyrna, joined together with the group at Pergamon to honor imperial gods during the provincial celebration of the emperor's birthday. The provincial civic communities, who bore the cost involved in bringing these groups together for this occasion, appreciated the hymn-singers' piety in this regard (cf. *IEph* 18d, lines 4-24; 44 CE).

## 2. Unofficial Group Settings

By far the majority of evidence for the participation of associations in imperial cult activities pertains to the internal life of these groups. The names of some associations suggest that members of the imperial household could be chosen as patron deities, being recipients of regular honors.<sup>25</sup> There are numerous examples from throughout Asia: the "friends-of-Agrippa" (*philagrippai*) association at Smyrna, the "friends of the Augusti" (*philosebas[toi]*) at Pergamon, and the "friends of Caesar brotherhood" (*phratraōn philokesareōn* [sic]) at Ilion.<sup>26</sup>

Similar groups would be found outside the walls of the Greek city. The Caesarists (*kaisariastai*) in a village near Smyrna (Mostenai), for instance, honored a man for his contributions to the association (*koinon*) in connection with its sacrifices for the Augusti and accompanying banquets (*IGR* IV 1348; cf. *IEph* 3817, from the village of Azoulenon). These cases attest to the importance of the emperors, and rituals for them, in the self-understanding of the groups in question.

There are indications that ethnic and occupational associations engaged in similar rituals for imperial gods. Dio Cassius, for example, refers to the fact that groups of Romans resident in Ephesos and in Nikaia offered cultic honors to both Roma and Julius Caesar in connection with the sanctuaries established for these deities around 29 BCE (*Roman History* 51.20.6-7). Several statues of imperial figures were dedicated by associations of Romans or Italians in Asia (cf. *IEph* 409; *IEph* 3019; *MAMA* VI 177, from Apameia Kelainai). The guild of shippers at Nikomedia in Bithynia dedicated its sanctuary (*temenos*) to Vespasian, which may be indicative of rituals in honor of that emperor (*TAM* IV 22; 70-71 CE).

25 Cf. Pleket 1958, 4-10; Price 1984, 118; Robert 1960b, 220-28.

26 *ISmyrna* 331 (cf. *IG* VI 374 [Sparta]; *IXanthos* 24; *IURL* 37847 [Rome]); *IPergamonAsklep* 84; and, Pleket 1958, 4, no. 4 (Ilion). The descriptive term "friends of the Augusti" (*philosebastoi*) was used by some associations when they decided on a name for the group: see *IEph* 293 (initiates); *ITrall* 77, 93, 145 (young men); *IGBulg* 667-668 (hymn-singers at Nikopolis in Moesia Inferior).



Unfortunately, remains of guild halls in Asia Minor have seldom been found or identified, but archeological evidence from elsewhere suggests a similar picture regarding the importance of the emperors within the life of such groups. On the island of Delos, the meeting-place of the merchants and shippers from Berytos (Beirut), for example, contained a sanctuary with a shrine for the goddess Roma set up “on account of the goodwill which she has in relation to the association and the homeland” (*IDelos* 1778 = *AGRW* 226; ca. 130–69 BCE). Certainly this group returned her goodwill with the appropriate honors, especially sacrifice. Elsewhere, several of the guild halls at Ostia in Italy contained portrait heads, busts, and statues of members of the imperial household, including a statue of the emperor Trajan in the ship-builders’ meeting-place (see figure 31). Russell Meiggs (1960, 325–27) concludes that “some form of imperial cult [was] common to all guilds.” I would suggest that we can imagine a similar integration of the emperors within the activities of other occupational or ethnic associations, and we do in fact encounter more direct evidence in the province of Asia that includes guilds.



Figure 31: Statue of Trajan in the ship-builders’ meeting-place at Ostia.

### (a) *Sacrifices*

The activities of other associations suggest a parallelism between honors addressed to the traditional gods and those addressed to the revered imperial gods. I have already mentioned the performance of sacrifice—the most important honor directed at deities in antiquity—within associations. Sacrifices or other forms of offerings for the gods inevitably involved a set of other ritual activities including prayers, hymns, libations, burning of incense, and, of course, the accompanying meal.

Recent studies regarding the meaning and function of sacrifice, which often employ insights from the social sciences, emphasize two main elements or functions of sacrifice within the ancient Greek world.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, sacrifice was a setting in which the bonds of human community were expressed and reinforced, reflecting and reinforcing social relations and hierarchies within society. On the other, sacrifice was a means of relation with gods and goddesses in order to solicit protection and avoid punishment for the group or community. Sacrifice was a symbolic expression of a world view concerning the nature of the cosmos and fitting relations within it. In other words, sacrifice, like other forms of ritual, encompassed a set of symbols which communicated, among other things, a certain understanding of relations between humans within the group and between human groups and deities. The incorporation of the emperors in the Greek system of sacrifice, therefore, tells us something about both the identities of groups and the place of imperial gods within the world view of the members of associations.

There is considerable evidence for the importance of sacrifices for the imperial gods within numerous groups. Associations sometimes dedicated altars to the Augustan (*Sebastoi*) gods generally or a particular member of the imperial family, or had benefactors that did so for them.<sup>28</sup> The hymn-singers at Pergamon, for example, whose internal activities definitely involved rituals for the emperors including sacrifices, dedicated an altar to Hadrian, “Olympios, savior and founder” (*IPergamon 374*; see figure 32). These dedications of altars are indicative of the inclusion of imperial gods in at least sacrifice and likely other rituals of the groups in question. It is not a far stretch to imagine that associations who dedicated other structures to the “Augustan gods,” such as the guild of merchants at Thyatira

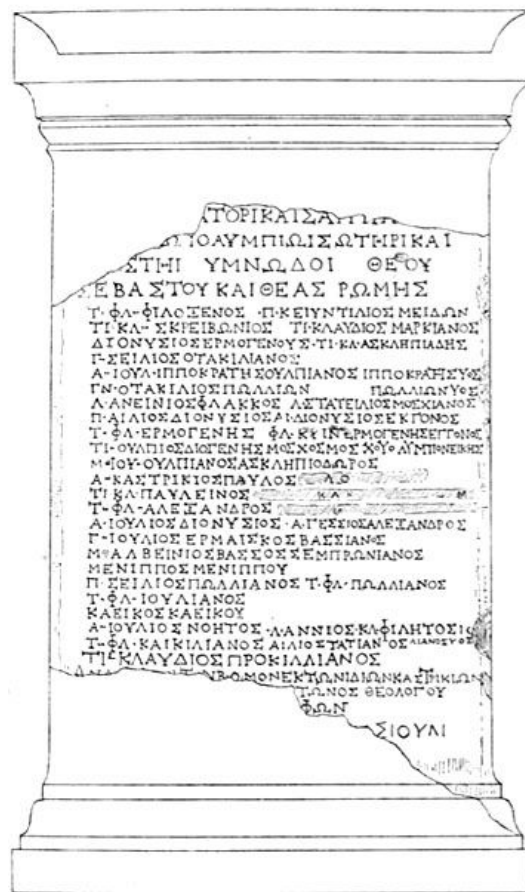


Figure 32: Drawing of the altar of the hymn-singers involving imperial mysteries (*IPergamon 374*, side A).

27 See, for instance, Burkert 1985 [1977], 54–75; Detienne and Vernant 1989 [1979]; Price 1984, 207–233; Zaidman and Pantel 1992, 27–45; Stowers 1995.

28 Cf. *IGR* IV 603 (near Aizanoi); *IEph* 1506; Radt 1999, 199 (Pergamon); *AE* (1984) 250, no. 855 (Hierapolis); *IMylasa* 403 (neighborhood association; cf. Robert 1937, 537).

([TAM V 862](#)), would also engage in sacrifices or other rituals for these same gods in their internal life as well.

There is even more direct evidence that sacrifices were made to imperial deities alongside traditional gods (or alone). We have already encountered this in the practices of the Demetriasts at Ephesos. Another inscription from Ephesos ([IEph 719](#) = *AGRW* 165), this one involving an occupational association, reveals the customary practices of the group in referring to the “physicians who sacrifice to the ancestor Asklepios and to the Augusti” (*hoi thyontes tō propatori Asklēpiō kai tois Sebastois iatroi*). Compare also an earlier reconstructed inscription from the time of Augustus which mentions an imperial freedman dedicating money to a synod, perhaps Roman businessmen, “in order to perform the sacrifice to Roma and the goddess” (*epitelesth[eisan tēi Rōmēi kai] tēi theōi thysian*; Engelmann 1990, 93–94, revising [IEph 859a](#)).

These inscriptions pertaining to sacrifice are particularly pertinent to one of Price’s claims. Despite his recognition of the varied importance of imperial cults (beyond the political), Price argues that sacrifices were generally and consciously made “on behalf of” (ὐπέρ) the emperors rather than “to” the emperors (using the dative in Greek), and that the majority of the evidence from Asia Minor reflects a conscious effort to use the former terminology.<sup>29</sup> This argument, coupled with other claims regarding imperial statues, is fundamental to his overall suggestion that in ritual practice the emperors were *not* equated with the gods but, rather, ontologically located “at the focal point between human and the divine.”<sup>30</sup>

The above inscriptions involving local associations, as well as the evidence for Demetriasts and hymn-singers discussed earlier (both of which use the dative of sacrifice), are examples where no such distinction is made between the revered imperial gods and other gods. As Friesen (1993, 149) states, “there is quite a bit of evidence from Asia and not cited by Price that equates the gods and the emperors in a sacrificial context. In fact, the vast majority of evidence does not distinguish gods from emperors.” Once again, this stresses that the emperors could function as gods within cultural life at the local level.

It was customary for a communal meal to follow such sacrifices in which foods offered to the gods, in this case the imperial gods, would be consumed by the members of the association. The banquets of associations were among the most common small-group settings where a person living and working in Ephesos, Pergamon or Thyatira would encounter on a regular basis sacrificial food that had been offered to the gods (*ta hierothyta*), including the imperial gods. This observation will become particularly relevant when we consider debates among Jesus-followers regarding eating food offered to idols (*ta eidōlothyta*).

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29 Price 1984, 207–33; cf. Nock 1972 [1930].

30 Price 1984, 233. Price’s other suggestion (1984, 146–56) is that imperial images that appeared in temples of other traditional gods were always subordinate (cf. Nock 1972a [1930]); this is also problematic, since even traditional gods did not share fully in the temples of other gods. Both of Price’s reasons for suggesting that the emperors were not perceived as divine (as gods) but rather as somewhere between human and divine can be viewed as problematic (see Friesen 1993, 73–75).





*Figure 33: Statue of Antinoos as Dionysos, now in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen.*



(b) *Mysteries*

There was a range of other possibilities in the ritual practices of associations, some of which can be discussed in connection with mysteries in honor of the imperial gods.<sup>31</sup> These imperial mysteries deserve special attention since scholars like Nock and Nilsson are concerned with downplaying their significance in order to argue that rituals for the imperial gods were not genuinely “religious.”

A few words of introduction regarding imperial mysteries generally will be useful before looking at associations. Sometimes mysteries could be performed within official, civic or provincial cultic contexts (cf. *IG XII.2* 205, from Lesbos). For instance, there were mysteries and related rituals in connection with “god Antinoos” (the beloved teenage companion of Hadrian) at various locations in the empire (see figure 33). There was a cult for him at Mantinea which involved sacrifices, games, and mystic rites (*teletē*; Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 8.9.7–8; *IG V.2* 312, 281). Pausanias mentions that similar rituals were practiced elsewhere, which is confirmed by Origen’s reference to mysteries for this figure at Antinoopolis, a city named after Antinoos (Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.36). A votive offering for the “new god, Antinoos” has been discovered at Claudiopolis in Bithynia (Antinoos’ hometown), and a chief-initiate (*mystarchēs*) appears to have led mysteries there in this god’s honor.<sup>32</sup>

Comparable mysteries were practiced in honor of other imperial gods in some official, civic and provincial cults of Asia Minor as well. In the inscriptions of Asia, Bithynia, and Galatia, for example, we come across functionaries called sebastophants (*sebastophantai*), that is, “revealers of the Augusti” in imperial mysteries.<sup>33</sup> Such functionaries were also found in unofficial mysteries, namely mysteries that do not seem to have been financially sponsored by civic or provincial institutions. Through participating in similar practices in a small-group setting, the members of an association could feel a sense of belonging not only within the group, but also within this broader civic or imperial framework. But to say that associations’ practices were, in part, a reflection of their surroundings is not to undermine the significance of these rituals for participants.

Egyptian papyrological evidence provides important background information concerning imperial mysteries and associations. One papyrus fragment from Antinoopolis, perhaps from a novel, makes reference to royal mysteries in Egypt from an earlier period: “Triptolemus . . . , not for you have I now performed initiation; neither Kore abducted did I see nor Demeter in her grief, but kings in their victory.” (*PAntinoopolis* I 18; late-II CE; trans. by Burkert 1993, 269). Reference to royal mysteries in Egypt, this time in connection with mysteries for Dionysos, also appears in an

31 Cf. Robert 1960a; Pleket 1965; Price 1984, 190–91; Herrmann 1996, 340–41.

32 Cf. Robert 1980, 132–38; Lambert 1984. See *IKlaudiop* 7 (bronze medallion dedicated to god Antinoos by the homeland), 56 (votive), 65 (*mystarchēs*); Price 1984, 266, catalogue no. 95. There is further evidence of cultic honors for Antinoos, sometimes involving associations: the “Hadrianic association” (probably performers) honored Antinoos as “the new god Hermes” (*IG XIV* 978a); an association (*collegium*) at Lanuvium in Italy was devoted to both Diana and Antinoos (*CIL XIV* 2112; 136 CE); and, a hymn has been recently found at Kurion on Cyprus which praises Antinoos as Adonis (see Lebek 1973).

33 For sebastophants, see *IGR IV* 522 (Dorylaion); *IGR IV* 643 (Akmoneia); *IEph* 2037, 2061, 2063 (early-II CE); *ISardBR* 62; and, *IGR IV* 1410 (Smyrna). In Bithynia and Galatia sebastophants were often functionaries in the provincial imperial cult: *IPrusiasHyp* 17, 46, 47 (Bithynia); *IGR III* 22 (Kios, Bithynia); *IPessinous* 17–18 (Galatia); *IGR III* 162, 173, 194, 204 (Ankyra, Galatia).

honorary poem for the king by Euphronios, which refers to celebrants in the mysteries of “new Dionysos,” that is, Ptolemy IV (Burkert 1993, 268–69). J. Tondriau (1946) traces the history of a continuing connection between Dionysiac mysteries and the royal court, including evidence for a “society” (*thiasos*) within the court during the reigns of Ptolemy IV Philopater (221–203 BCE), Ptolemy XII Auletes (80–51 BCE), and Cleopatra and Mark Antony (42–20 BCE; cf. Plutarch, *Antony* 24).<sup>34</sup> Here we have references to mystic rites, akin to the traditional mysteries of Demeter, Kore, Dionysos, and others, associated with Hellenistic royalty in Egypt, foreshadowing the sorts of practices we encounter during the Roman imperial era.

Another papyrus fragment found at Oxyrhynchos brings us into the imperial era and provides an interesting link between Egypt and Asia Minor in regard to imperial mysteries. The papyrus, which dates to the third century of our era, preserves part of a novel in which a character condemns what he sees as the imitation of Demeter’s Eleusinian mysteries in the performance of mysteries to magnify “Caesar” in Egypt. The critic attributes the origins of such rites to Bithynia in Asia Minor: “It was not we who originally invented those rites, which is to our credit, but it was a Nikaian who was the first to institute them . . . let the rites be his, and let them be performed among his people alone . . . unless we wish to commit sacrilege against Caesar himself, as we should commit sacrilege against Demeter also, if we performed to her here the ritual used there; for she is unwilling to allow any rites of that sort . . .” (*POxy* 1612; cf. Deubner 1919, 8–11). The critic seems concerned with impiety against both Caesar and Demeter, but we know too little to assess precisely why this character objects to these rituals. Nonetheless, this papyrus further demonstrates that mysteries were performed in honor of rulers or emperors in regions of the Greek East such as Egypt and Asia Minor, and that they could resemble mysteries in honor of deities such as Demeter.

Now that we have some background on royal and imperial mysteries we can turn to the practices of associations in western Asia Minor. I have already discussed at some length the mysteries of the Demetriasts at Ephesos, who, similar to those critiqued by the character in the novel, integrated the emperors within mysteries for Demeter. Yet there were comparable practices within other groups as well, which suggest that imperial mysteries were not uncommon within associations, though probably not as widespread as were sacrificial rituals for imperial gods.

The Augusti could be incorporated within the mysteries of Dionysos. There are Hellenistic precedents for the importance of ruler cults within these groups in Asia Minor as well. In one inscription from Pergamon, for instance, “the bacchants of the god to whom you call ‘euoi!’” (i.e. Dionysos) dedicated an altar “to King Eumenes, god, savior, and benefactor” (Prott and Kolbe 1902 94–95, no. 86 = *AGRW* 113; 197–159 BCE).<sup>35</sup> In light of this context, it would not be far-fetched to suggest the continuing importance of similar cultic honors involving the imperial gods alongside

34 Similar royal rituals may have taken place within associations devoted to Egyptian rulers, including the “royalists” (*basilistai*) at Thera (*IG* XII.3 443) and at Setis (*OGIS* 130; II BCE), and the “Eupatorists” (*Eupatoristai*) on Delos (*OGIS* 367).

35 The civic cult and mysteries of Dionysos Kathegemon (“the Leader”) at Pergamon had a history of close connections with the royal Attalid family and ruler cult. See Prott 1902; Ohlmutz 1968 [1940], 90–122; Burkert 1993, 264–68. There were also close connections between the Dionysiac performers centred at Teos, the cult of Kathegemon at Pergamon, and Attalid rulers. See Allen 1983, 145–58 and Strang 2007.

Dionysos within the association of cowherds in Roman Pergamon, though this is not directly attested. It is worth noting that at least one member of the hymn-singers (or a relative of that member), a group whose imperial rituals are clear, also appears as a member of the cowherds (L. Aninius Flaccus; *IPergamon* 374 A 11).

There are other indications that the imperial gods could be integrated within the mysteries of Dionysos. According to a fragmentary inscription from the time of Commodus found at Ephesos, for instance, mysteries were performed there in honor of Dionysos, Zeus Panhellenios, and Hephaistos (*IEph* 1600). More importantly, it seems that those who led the mysteries—likely the Dionysiac initiates we encounter in other inscriptions—also included the emperor identified as “new Dionysos” (line 46) in the mysteries and sacrifices (cf. *IEph* 293 = *AGRW* 173). Lines 17–50 seem to involve participants taking on the role of particular deities in some sort of re-enactment of the stories of the gods, something along the lines of the dramatic practices of the Iobacchoi at Athens and the Dionysiac performers at Ankyra (cf. Hicks in the notes to *GIBM* III 600).

Further evidence of imperial mysteries is worth mentioning. Peter Herrmann discusses a quite heavily reconstructed inscription from Sardis, which may refer to a revealer of the Augusti (*sebastophantēs*) and a revealer of the sacred objects (*hierophantēs*) in the mysteries of an association (Herrmann 1996, 340–41 on *ISardBR* 62; II CE). There is a lack of evidence regarding imperial mysteries within associations devoted to Isis or Sarapis in Asia Minor. Still, it is noteworthy that a “company” (*taxis*) of paean-singers (*Paianistai*) at Rome (probably consisting of members originally from the Greek East) chose both Sarapis and the Augustan (*Sebastoi*) gods as its patrons, suggesting rituals for the imperial gods as a normal part of this group’s activities (*IGUR* 77 = *AGRW* 319; 146 CE).

Unfortunately, due to the nature of the evidence, mysteries and other related practices of the Demetriasts, Dionysiac initiates, and others are only mentioned in passing, telling us little of the actual details of what was involved. Still, one monument from Pergamon may help to clarify some of what was involved in activities for the imperial gods, serving as an appropriate conclusion to this section.

Besides their occasional participation in singing during civic or provincial celebrations, the association of hymn-singers at Pergamon engaged in imperial mysteries and sacrifices internally. One monument, which was dedicated to Hadrian, contains an inscription that outlines the provision of food and wine for the group’s calendar of meetings, including the celebrations of the birthday of Augustus and the mysteries which lasted several days (*IPergamon* 374 = *AGRW* 117, side B lines 10, 16). The celebrations and mysteries included sacrifices to Augustus and Roma (side D, line 14) and accompanying banquets, as well as the use of sacrificial cakes, incense, and, notably, lamps for the image of the “revered one (*Sebastos*)” (side B, line 18–19). Further on “images of the revered ones (*Sebastoi*)” (side C, line 13) are mentioned again. Apparently images of Augustus or other imperial gods were revealed in the lamplight by a Sebastophant-like participant, the equivalent of the “revealer of sacred objects” in Demeter’s mysteries at Eleusis. This interpretation regarding nature of such imperial mysteries also coincides with the case of a Dionysiac company (*speira*) in Thracia. That group also included functionaries responsible for lamps and several revealers of the Augusti (sebastophants) alongside other participants with titles that suggest mysteries for Dionysos

(*IGBulg* 1517; Cillae, 241–244 CE). It is quite possible that the mysteries of the Demetriasts at Ephesos, or of other associations, included similar activities to those of the hymn-singers.

Pleket (1965, 346) concludes from his study of imperial mysteries that Nilsson's use of the term "pseudo-mysteries" to refer to such rites is unwarranted since "the mysteries at Pergamum as far as their rites are concerned were true copies of the traditional mysteries; both include hymns, glorification . . . , showing of the image." Nilsson's assertions that these imperial mysteries, like other cultic activities associated with the emperors, were merely "a public demonstration of loyalty" and were "really devoid of any mystical content," is based less on evidence than on his own presuppositions and overall paradigm regarding the nature of imperial cults generally.<sup>36</sup>

### **Insights from the Social Sciences: The Significance of Imperial Rituals within Associations**

The traditional view of imperial cults corresponds to a particular theoretical trajectory in the modern study of religion, a trajectory that favors the personal feelings of the individual over communal actions or rituals (e.g. sacrifice) in defining what it accepts as meaningful religion. From this perspective corporate ceremonies are often merely outward or mechanical actions ("empty shells") with little significance to the essence of religion. As anthropologist Mary Douglas (1973, 19–39) points out, this modern tendency to devalue ritual as synonymous with meaningless and mechanical forms of religion has its roots, in part, in the anti-ritualist tradition of the Reformations of the sixteenth century. This theoretical framework does not do justice to the function and meaning of ritual actions, including "political" rituals, by which I mean rituals closely associated with power relations within society.

A brief discussion of insights from sociologists and anthropologists concerning ritual will help to clarify the significance of imperial cults in antiquity, including rituals within associations. Here I use the term "ritual," as do many others in this field, to refer to "symbolic behavior that is socially standardized and repetitive," as "action wrapped in a web of symbolism."<sup>37</sup>

Clifford Geertz's influential anthropological studies provide useful insights here. Geertz is in many ways representative of a now common approach which understands religion as a cultural system of symbols or inherited conceptions, analogous to language, which communicates meanings.<sup>38</sup> A symbol in this sense is "any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception—the conception is the symbol's meaning" (Geertz 1973, 91). As a system of symbols, religion acts to coordinate and maintain both the way of life (ethos) and the world view of a particular group, community or society: "Religious symbols formulate a basic congruence between a particular style of life and a specific (if, most often, implicit) metaphysic, and in so doing sustain each with the borrowed authority of the other" (Geertz 1973, 90).

According to Geertz, ritual plays a very important role in sustaining the interplay between social experience and world view, or notions of the overall cosmic framework. As concrete actions

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36 Nilsson 1961, 370 (trans. mine): "Das eine Extrem vertreten die Mysterien im Kaiserkult, der, wenn irgendeiner, eine öffentliche Kundgebung der Loyalität und mystischen Inhaltes wirklich bar war."

37 Kertzer 1988, 9. Cf. Douglas 1973, 26–27; Geertz 1973, 112–14)

38 Geertz 1973, 87–141. Cf. Vernant's similar view of Greek religion as cited in Zaidman and Pantel 1992, 22–23.

performed in the realm of lived reality, rituals reinforce the apparent truth of the world view:

For it is in ritual . . . that this conviction that religious conceptions are veridical and that religious directives are sound is somehow generated. It is in some sort of ceremonial form . . . that the moods and motivations [ethos] which sacred symbols induce in men [and women] and the general conceptions of the order of existence [world view] which they formulate for men [and women] meet and reinforce one another. In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world (Geertz 1973, 112).

Ritual, then, plays an important role in reinforcing a set of conceptions and symbols concerning the order of the cosmos and society. Another related point which should be made is that ritual actions can be concrete expressions or even performances of what people think of the world and their place within it. As Catherine Bell (1997, xi) puts it, “the fundamental efficacy of ritual activity lies in its ability to have people embody assumptions about their place in a larger order of things.”

Some of these insights have been applied in studies of rituals associated with power and politics. These are worth discussing since our present focus is on Roman imperial cults, which are often dismissed as meaningless *political* ceremonies. Social scientific and cross-cultural studies in this area show that even those public rites and ceremonies that we as moderns categorize as “political” can have meaningful and even cosmological significance for participants or observers.<sup>39</sup> It is in Geertz’s cross-cultural study of royal rituals in Elizabethan England, fourteenth century Java, and nineteenth century Morocco, for example, that he speaks of “the inherent sacredness of sovereign power” (Geertz 1977, 151). He goes on to argue that it is royal ceremonies “that mark the center as center and give what goes on there its aura of being not merely important, but in some odd fashion *connected with the way the world is built*. The gravity of high politics and the solemnity of high worship spring from liker impulses than might first appear” (Geertz 1977, 152-53 [emphasis mine]).

Other instructive generalizations come from Maurice Bloch’s anthropological case study of the royal bath ceremony in nineteenth-century Madagascar, in which he proposes a dual understanding of royal rituals. On the one hand, they function to legitimate authority by “making royal power an essential aspect of a cosmic social and emotional order.” On the other, the effectiveness of this function is rooted in how royal rituals employ symbolism from the rituals of the everyday life of ordinary people (Bloch 1987, esp. pp. 294-97). As Bell (1997, 135) states:

Political rituals display symbols and organize symbolic action in ways that attempt to demonstrate that the values and forms of social organization to which the ritual testifies are neither arbitrary nor temporary but follow naturally from the way the world is organized. For this reason, ritual has long been considered more effective than coercive force in securing people’s assent to a particular order.

Price’s study of imperial cult rituals in Roman Asia Minor reflects insights similar to those I have just outlined. He rejects the conventional approach of many scholars of Greco-Roman religion who have focused on the mental states of individuals. Instead, he approaches imperial

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39 Cf. Cannadine and Price 1987; Kertzer 1988.

rituals as a “way of conceptualizing the world,” as part of a “system whose structure defines the position of the emperor” (Price 1984, 7–11). This system involving imperial rituals, he suggests, was important for all levels of society and functioned in various ways:

Using their traditional symbolic system [inhabitants of Asia Minor] represented the emperor to themselves in the familiar terms of divine power. The imperial cult, like the cults of the traditional gods, created a relationship of power between subject and ruler. It also enhanced the dominance of local elites over the populace, of cities over other cities, and of Greek over indigenous cultures. That is, the cult was a major part of the web of power that formed the fabric of society (Price 1984, 248).

The broadly-based nature of Price’s insightful analysis of imperial cults did not allow him to focus attention on the significance of rituals within small-group settings or associations, however.

In light of these studies on ritual, we can better understand imperial rituals within associations. Contrary to what Poland and others suggest, we need to realize that imperial gods were an important component within the self-understandings or identities of some or perhaps many associations. The performance of sacrifice, mysteries or other rituals for emperors in the group-setting was not simply an outward and meaningless statement of political loyalty. This was a symbolic expression of a world view held in common by those participating. Within this cosmic framework, the Augusti (*Sebastoi*) were placed at the height of power alongside other gods in a realm separate from, though in interaction with, humans and human communities. Concrete ritual actions not only expressed this conception of reality but also reinforced the participants’ sense that this conception corresponded to the way things actually were in real life.

As we have observed, imperial rituals were closely bound up in, and reflect the system of, symbols associated with cults for the gods more generally. This close link between symbols within imperial rituals and those of the everyday life of persons living within cities in Roman Asia Minor suggests the meaningfulness of both for the participants. This helps to explain the effectiveness of symbolism associated with the imperial gods for legitimating the existing structures of power or authority. Yet it is important to stress the grass-roots or spontaneous nature of these honors and ritual actions. They served to legitimate the authority and ideology of Roman rule within a developing ideology or world view of the Greek city (*polis*) and its inhabitants. It seems that there was not always a need for Roman authorities to systematically propagate or enforce an ideology which legitimated their position of power within the Greek-speaking part of the empire. They simply had to take advantage of and encourage aspects of a developing symbolic framework that already existed.

Rituals within associations functioned and expressed cultural meaning in a variety of ways. The understanding of the cosmos (including the revered emperors) which was expressed in ritual strengthened the sense of belonging within the group. Yet engaging in such ritual simultaneously made a statement regarding the place of that group or community within the societal and cosmic order of things. Such practices expressed something of how the members of such a group regarded their relation to the most important figures of power. The group could be viewed as playing a part in the overall maintenance of fitting relations within the webs of connections that linked individuals of different social strata, groups, civic (or provincial) communities, imperial functionaries, and the



gods. In so doing, an association was also reflecting, often unconsciously, certain features of cultural life in the civic community.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the evidence from western Asia Minor suggests that practices in honor of imperial gods, which paralleled the sacrifices, mysteries and other rituals directed at traditional deities, were a significant component within numerous associations. There is no reason evident in the inscriptions themselves to suggest that these rituals were any less meaningful or “religious” than those connected with honoring traditional gods. Furthermore, insights regarding the function and meaning of ritual should steer us even further away from common assumptions held by scholars of imperial cults in the past.

Alongside interactions with civic and imperial officials, cultic honors for the imperial gods were a means by which such groups engaged in what was considered by their contemporaries as fitting relations with those at the pinnacle of the networks and hierarchies of society and the cosmos. The external relations and internal activities of these groups indicate areas of integration within society and evince one of several factors involved in their claiming a place within the Greek city under Roman rule.<sup>40</sup>

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40 On the integration of associations within civic life, see also Nijf 1997, Gutsfeld 1998, and Sommer 2006.



## 5 / POSITIVE INTERACTIONS AND IMPERIAL CONNECTIONS

### Introduction

When Trajan received a letter from Pliny, then governor of Bithynia and Pontus (a province in northern Asia Minor), requesting that an association (*collegium*) be formed to fight fires at Nikomedia, this emperor cautioned that “we must remember that societies (*civitates*) of this sort have been responsible for the disturbances in your province, especially in the towns. Under whatever name they assemble and for whatever reason we give, they soon turn into a political club (*hetaeria*)” (*Epistles* 10.34 = *AGRW* L40). The initial impression one might get from reading this passage in Pliny’s correspondence or Livy’s account of the senate’s suppression of Dionysiac associations in republican Rome (written in the Augustan era), or most of modern scholarship, for that matter, is that there was a strong suspicion among the elites regarding associations, which often led to strict controlling action. One might think that the reality of relations between such groups and imperial authorities in the day-to-day life of the provinces would primarily reflect such tensions. In light of such views, one would not expect to find Roman officials like Pliny or other civic and imperial functionaries interacting with such apparently subversive groups, let alone actively supporting, say, a Dionysiac association at Pergamon or a lower-class guild of clothing dyers at Thyatira. Yet this initial impression is quite misleading.

When we turn from the scant literary references regarding upper-class views of these groups to look at the actual ongoing relations which could exist between the elites (Roman officials and governors included) and associations of various kinds in the province of Asia, a very different picture emerges. This picture involves a fair degree of positive interaction which scholars have not sufficiently recognized in the past. Associations could be very much involved in the webs of relations which characterized civic life and which linked the Greek cities to the Roman empire. In some respects, we can speak of the integration of many associations within society rather than an ongoing opposition to it.

The involvement of associations in imperial aspects of the honorific system further attests to ways in which these groups cemented their relationship with the Greek city (*polis*), identifying with its interests. Drawing on the social sciences to analyze connections between associations and the elites in networks helps to explain the place of these groups within society. Two case studies—one focusing on an influential Julian family of Asia Minor and the other looking at connections from the perspective of a guild dyers at Thyatira—will set the stage for a survey of connections between associations and those who assumed imperial positions both locally and provincially. Participation in monumental honors for the emperors or imperial family specifically communicates something about how such groups understood and expressed their own conception of where they fit within society and the cosmos. All of this provides a new perspective on the evidence for tense relations and the intervention of authorities in the lives of associations, which is discussed at length in the next chapter. The aim is to provide a balanced view of associations and society than has been common within scholarship in the past by taking more evidence into consideration.

## Insights from the Social Sciences: Social Network Analysis

The *metaphorical* use of “networks” to speak of social relations which exist among individuals and groups within a social system is a common one. Yet since the mid-1950s social scientists have developed the concept of the social network as an *analytical* tool for studying specific phenomena within society.<sup>1</sup> The social anthropologist J. Clyde Mitchell (1969, 2) defines the social network “as a specific set of linkages among a defined set of persons [or groups], with the additional property that the characteristics of these linkages as a whole may be used to interpret the social behavior of the persons [or groups] involved.” Several sociological insights regarding patterns of ties which make up a social network serve as helpful exploratory tools here. Work by scholars such as L. Michael White (1992), John K. Chow (1992), and Harold Remus (1996) suggests the value in employing such tools in the study of antiquity and early Christianity. Others such as Andreas Bendlin (2002) provide insights by approaching Roman society as a whole in terms of a social network, and Bendlin argues that associations played an important role in social and economic networking in non-elite strata of society. Moreover, insights from social network theory may help us to better understand the nature and significance of the interactions between associations and benefactors within the social structures of city and empire, providing us with a firm basis upon which to establish the place of these groups within society.

Both Mitchell (1969) and Barry Wellman (1983) discuss several dimensions of social network analysis which are of importance to the following discussion of associations. Mitchell uses the term *interactional dimensions* to speak of the characteristics of the links themselves, which are “crucial in understanding the social behavior” (Mitchell 1969, 20). Among interactional dimensions are the following: *content* pertains to the original purpose of a particular link, be it economic, kinship, religious or occupational; *directedness* pertains to the direction of the flow of interaction, be it reciprocal or otherwise; *durability* pertains to whether the ties are temporary or ongoing; and, *intensity* refers to the “degree to which individuals are prepared to honor obligations, or feel free to exercise the rights implied in their link to some other person” (Mitchell 1969, 27). All of these play a role in shaping the social behaviors and interactions of the actors, and below I explore how this provides a framework for discussing the connections of associations.

Wellman (1983) identifies several other key principles that are pertinent here. First, ties in a social network are often asymmetrically reciprocal, involving the exchange of resources which may be either material or intangible (e.g. honor, being liked). Thus, although the members of a bakers’ guild differed greatly in status from the wealthy civic or imperial official, relations between them involved an exchange of resources. The association gained financial support and the prestige of links with a prominent person. An official gained honor and non-financial forms of support, bringing advantage in competition with other members of the aristocracy. Second, ties can directly or indirectly link the members of a local network with larger network structures. Connections between an association and a Roman proconsul, for example, involved a link between the local social networks (in which the association was a clear participant) and larger networks that linked

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1 See Mitchell 1969, 1973, 1974; Whitten and Wolfe 1973; Boissevain 1974; Price 1981; Wellman 1983; Wasserman 1994.

the Greek city to province and empire.

Finally, Wellman discusses how networks structure collaboration and competition to secure scarce resources (whether material or otherwise). This principle is particularly apt for our present discussion. We have seen that associations themselves were groups based, in part, on social network connections, allowing collaboration among members to secure resources, such as benefaction from the wealthy. On the other hand, associations could compete with one another for access to the limited resource of benefactors within broader social networks. Correspondingly, the elites could compete with one another for prestige and honor, as well as non-financial forms of support (e.g. political support) which accompanied patronage of groups and institutions.

### Two Case Studies: Views from Above and Below

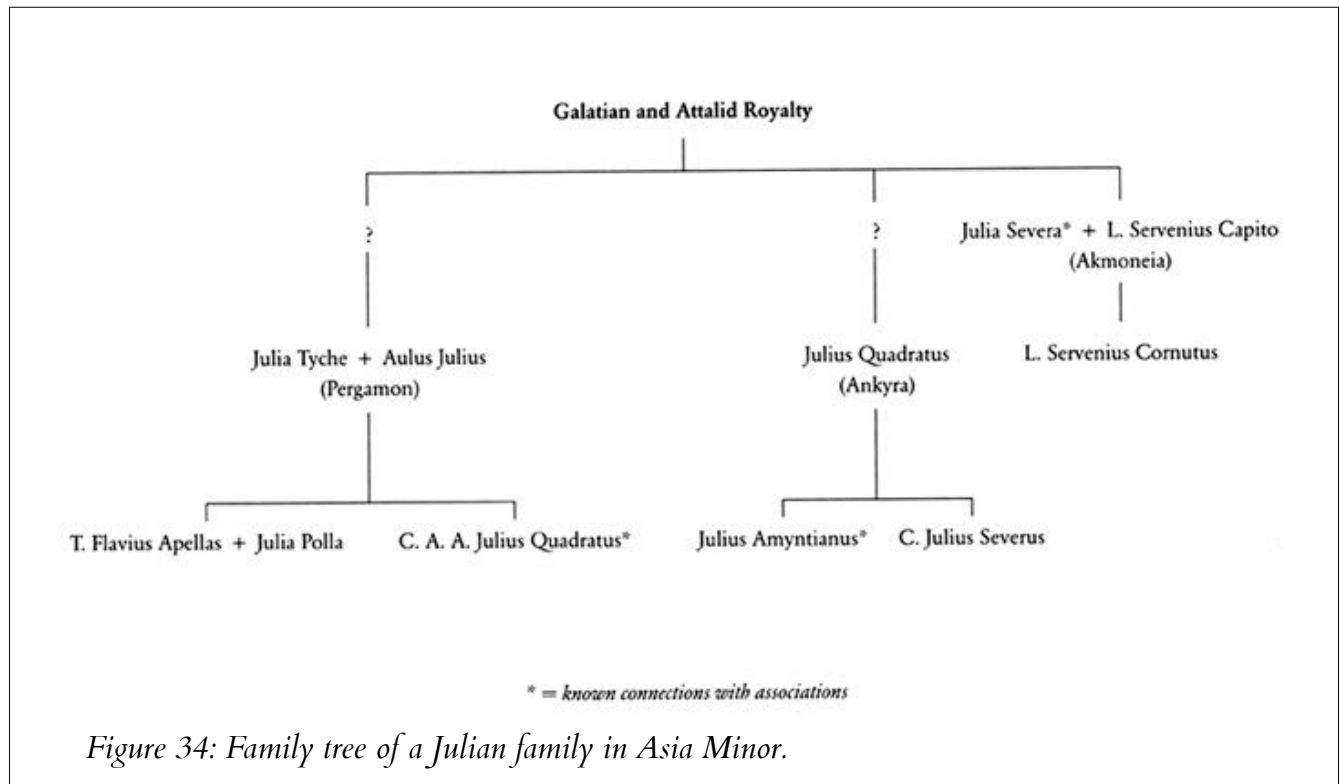
We will begin to see how these characteristics of networks worked themselves out in the reality of associative life presently through two case studies: one from the perspective of an elite Julian family in Asia Minor and the other from the perspective of a guild of dyers at Thyatira. Riet van Bremen's recent study of women in Asia Minor stresses the importance of the family for understanding many facets of civic life, including elite behavior. As she states, "to fulfill all one's civic duties loyally and, if possible, splendidly, and to be seen to do so from generation to generation, was one of the crucially important ideologies that shaped the self-image of Greek civic elites" (Bremen 1996, 46). Family traditions of beneficent excellence, whether to the city or its constituent groups, reflected a competitive ethos which shaped relations between elite families and influenced behavior among members of particular families. Associations could be among the beneficiaries of such family traditions, maintaining important contacts with the provincial imperial elites.

The case of a certain Julian family of Asia Minor is illustrative. These were descendents of Galatian and Attalid royalty who entered into imperial service as equestrians and then senators by the late-first century. Scholars who engage in the study of names and family lineages (prosopography) in the Roman world have given some attention to members of this family. Most of the family tree connections outlined in figure 34 are certain, a few are probable.<sup>2</sup> Members of this family habitually included associations as recipients of their benefactions. Julia Severa was an important figure in Akmoneia in the mid-first century, acting as director of contests (*agōnothetis*) and high-priestess in the local temple of the "Augustan (*Sebastoi*) gods." She was a benefactor not only to the local elders' organization (*gerousia*) but also to the synagogue of Judeans, for whom she supplied a meeting-place (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> I 701; Halfmann 1979, no. 5a; *MAMA* VI 263; *MAMA* VI 264 = *IJO* II 168). A generation or so later, several others who may have been freedmen associated with

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2 On the family tree, see *IGR* III 373–75 (= *IAnkyraBosch* 105, 156–57), Halfmann 1979 (passim) and White 1998, 366–371. C. Julius Severus at Ankyra is known to be an *anepsios* (often meaning cousin) of C. A. A. Julius Quadratus of Pergamon, and C. Julius Severus' brother was definitely a man named Julius Amytianus (*IGR* III 373 = *OGIS* 544). Simone Follet (1976, 133) convincingly argues for the probability that this is the same Julius Amytianus that we find at Tralles, if not a relative in some other way. Scholars are in general agreement that Julia Severa is most likely a relative of C. Julius Severus of Ankyra, and therefore of the others, though we lack an inscription that states it explicitly. The Attalid and Galatian royal ancestry includes Attalos II, Deiotaros, and Amyntas (*IGR* III 373).

Severa's family renovated the building by decorating the ceiling and walls and adding shutters to the windows.



Severa's relative, C. Antius Aulus Julius Quadratus, was a prominent Pergamene and senator who assumed the Roman consulate in 94 and 105 CE. He held numerous provincial offices in the Greek East, including legate in Asia, Bithynia-Pontus, Lycia-Pamphylia, and Syria, and proconsul of Asia in 109-110 CE (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> I 507; Halfmann 1979, no. 17). Quadratus' mother, Julia Tyche, was also a prominent figure at Pergamon, being both "queen" of the precincts of goddess Roma and priestess of Demeter (Ippel 1912, 298-301, no. 24). It is worth mentioning that Quadratus was a member in the elite-association of "Arval Brothers" at Rome from about 72 CE. Numerous cities honored him for his services and benefactions including Laodikeia in Syria, Ephesos in Asia, Side in Pamphylia, and, of course, his home town of Pergamon (*IEph* 614, 1538; *ISide* 57; *IPergamon* 436-451). Yet he was also the benefactor of local organizations and associations at home, including the synod of young men (*neoi*; *IPergamon* 440) and, on more than one occasion, the Dionysiac "dancing cowherds" (*IPergamon* 486a-b; Conze and Schuchhardt 1899, 179-80, no. 31 = *AGRW* 116). These "cowherds," whose banqueting-hall we have already discussed, came into contact with him directly when he was priest of Dionysos Kathegemon. Another relative, Julius Amyntianus, probably Quadratus' cousin, was a member in the Panhellenion institution of Athens, but also the priest of Isis and Sarapis at Tralles for a time, for which an association of initiates of these Egyptian deities honored him with a monument (*ITrall* 86 = *AGRW* 205; post-131 CE; see *PIR*<sup>2</sup> I 147; Follet 1976, 133; see figure 35).



Considering interactional dimensions of these links in social networks between members of this family and associations can help us to better understand the nature of connections. First of all, the *content* or purposes of all these instances of interaction—“the meanings which the persons in the network attribute to their relationships” (Mitchell 1969, 20)—are similar, though not necessarily identical. Furthermore, the *directedness* of all links are reciprocal, though certainly not equal. Both Julia Severa and the Judeans at Akmonia would clearly understand the link in terms of a benefactor-beneficiary relationship: the exchange of tangible material aid (donation of a meeting-place) for the far less tangible, though extremely valuable, return of honors.

The purposes of the interaction between both Quadratus and Amyntianus and associations at Pergamon and Tralles respectively likewise pertain to benefaction and honors, but there is a further element involving piety towards the gods in the content of these contacts. Both men are priests of the deities to whom the associations are devoted, and this would have been a key factor in ensuring benefaction in the first place. The service of these men as priests—thereby bringing about fitting honors for the deities in question—would on its own warrant reciprocation from the associations, so the content of the link is not limited to the material or financial.

Owing to the partial nature of inscriptional evidence, it is difficult to assess the *durability* of connections between a certain person and a given association. Still, if Quadratus’ relations with the cowherds is any indication, there was often potential for ongoing links over time. In such cases, the social pressures on both the wealthy person to make further benefactions and on the association to respond with appropriate honors (i.e. the *intensity* of the link) would be considerable. Failure of an association to respond to a benefaction with clearly visible honors in return would be disastrous in its hopes of maintaining contacts with this or any other influential person. As such, an element of competition among associations, groups, and institutions in securing the benefaction of wealthy inhabitants helped to maintain this asymmetrically reciprocal system of honors. From this elite family’s perspective, such links with local associations were part of a larger set of connections with institutions, groups, and individuals within the city and province. These links helped to ensure the family reputation of beneficence in competition with other aristocratic families, securing family-members’ high position and degree of honor within society.

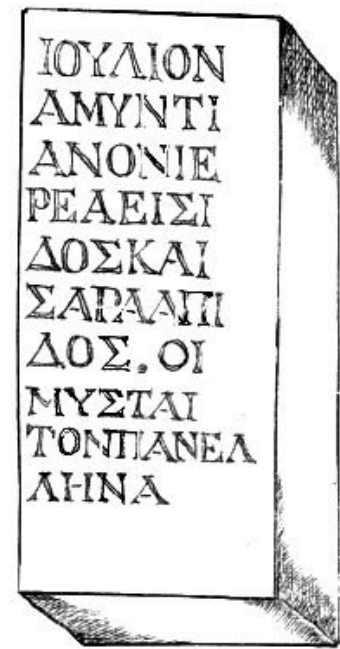
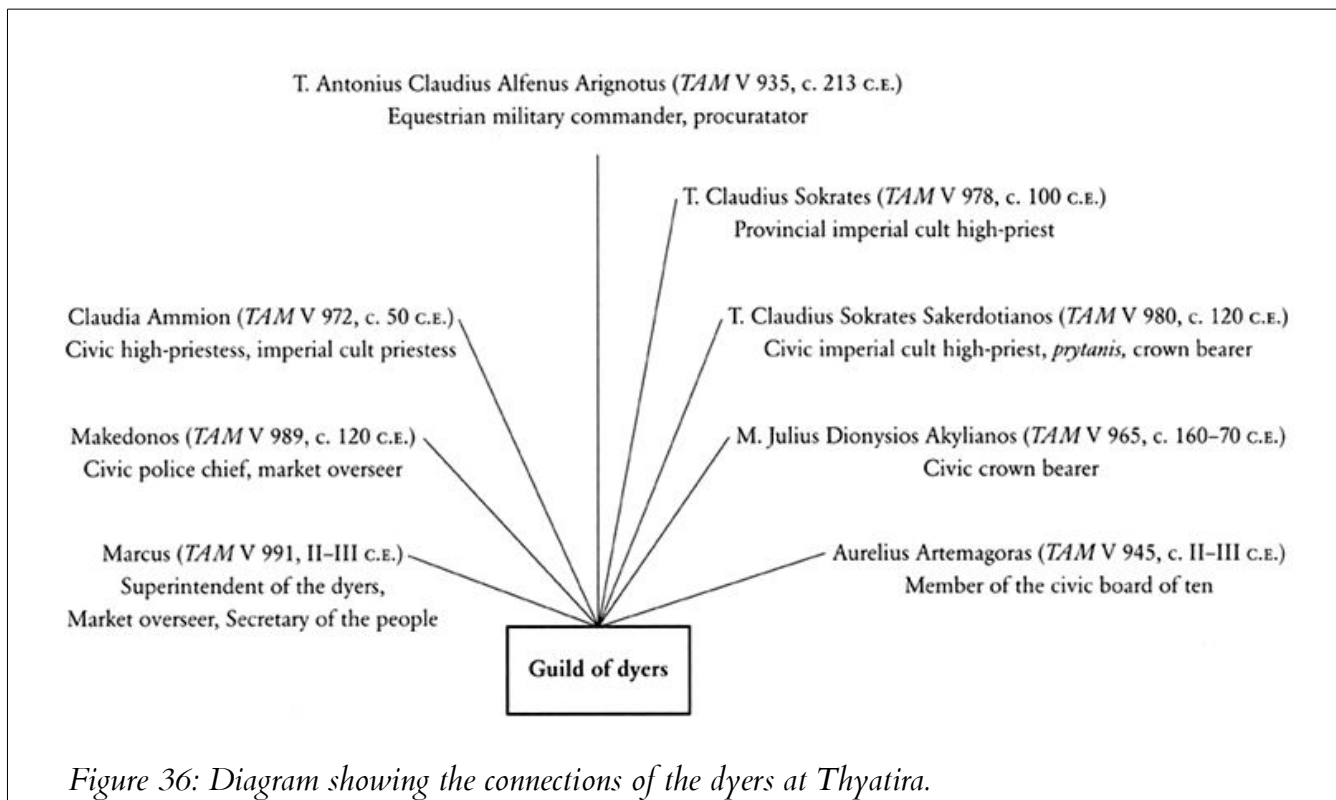


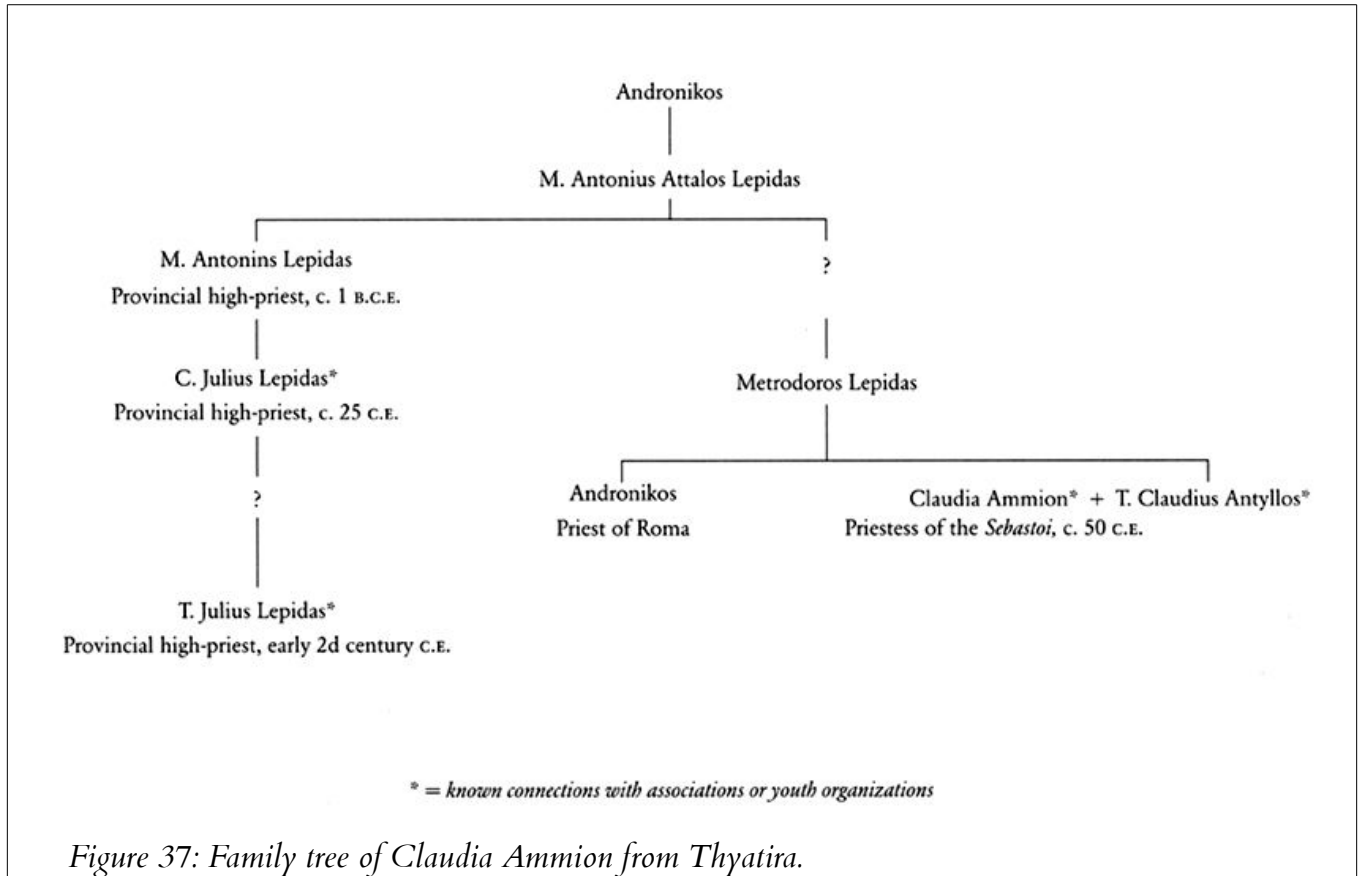
Figure 35: Facsimile of the monument honoring Julius Amyntianus, priest of Isis and Sarapis at Tralles.



What happens to be missing from the material evidence which has survived regarding this Julian family is information regarding relations with occupational associations. Yet there is plenty of evidence that guilds also maintained similar ongoing interactions with members of other prominent families. The case of the guild of dyers at Thyatira provides us with the view from below at a particular locality, revealing the continuing interactions which helped to cement a particular group's position within the networks which linked the city to province and empire. We get momentary glimpses of these ongoing links at several points in the group's history, which can be partially reconstructed from ten extant inscriptions (many pertaining to the same guild), five of which involve imperial connections (*TAM V 935, 945, 965, 972, 978, 980, 989, 991, 1029, 1081*). Figure 36 provides an illustration of the connections that existed between the dyers and different benefactors over the span of about two centuries. Around the year 50 CE the dyers set up an honorary monument for Claudia Ammion, a priestess of the Augusti (probably a civic-level cult) and high-priestess of the city who had also been director of contests "in a brilliant and extravagant manner with purity and modesty" (*TAM V 972* = *AGRW* 129).

Claudia Ammion belonged to an aristocratic family in Thyatira with kin in other cities of Asia (see the family tree in figure 37). Her brother, Andronikos, for instance, was a civic president (*prytanis*) and priest of the goddess Roma. Some of her other relatives were also benefactors of associations or gymnasium organizations. Claudia's kinsman, C. Julius Lepidus (probably a cousin once removed), was a high-priest in the provincial imperial cult like his father (see *ISardBR* 8, line 99), and he had been a benefactor of an athletic club which met in the "third gymnasium" in Thyatira just decades earlier (*TAM V 968* = *AGRW* 132; ca. 25 CE). Claudia's husband, T.

Claudius Antyllos, was honored by a gymnastic association, the “partners” which met in this same gymnasium; he had supplied them with oil (*TAM V* 975; ca. 50 CE). Another kinsman of this Lepidus family, T. Julius Lepidus of Sardis, was secretary of the provincial council of Asia in the late-first or early-second century. This Lepidus was honored with marble plaques by both the organization of youths (ephebes) and “those engaged in business in the slave-market (*statariō*)” at Sardis (see [SEG 46 \[1996\]](#), no. 1524 = *AGRW* 124, revising *ISardBR* 46).



Around the turn of the century in Thyatira, dyers honored a member of another family, T. Claudius Sokrates. Sokrates was the founder of several civic building projects and director of contests. He had held a prestigious position as high-priest of Asia in the provincial imperial temple at Pergamon (*TAM V* 978 = *AGRW* 132; before 113 CE). The dyers were by no means the only occupational association at the time seeking the support of such imperial-affiliated citizens. At about the same time, the leather-cutters were honoring another man, T. Flavius Alexandros, the curator of the association (*conventus*) of Romans and Thyatira’s ambassador to Rome (*TAM V* 1002 = *AGRW* 131). It seems that connections with local associations continued in the Sokrates family. A group, likely the guild of dyers, also honored his son Sakerdotianos, a high-priest of the Augusti (*Sebastoi*) who had displayed “love of honor since he was a boy” towards the city, conducting himself “in accordance with his ancestors’ love of glory” (*TAM V* 980; ca. 120–30 CE; see figure 38). Yet the dyers’ allegiance was not limited to this particular family, for at about the same time the guild joined with civic institutions of Thyatira in honoring Makedonos, the police-chief

(*eirēnarchos*) and market-overseer (*agoranomos*; *TAM V* 989 = *AGRW* 133). The dyers honored other persons in influential civic positions of Thyatira in the following decades, including two that were also members or leaders of the guild (e.g. *TAM V* 945, *TAM V* 965, *TAM V* 991).

We get a final glimpse of imperial connections when about 213 CE the dyers honor T. Antonius Claudius Alfenus Arignotus, a military commander of the equestrian order who reached the office of procurator and had served in different parts of the Greek East (*TAM V* 935 = *AGRW* 136; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> A 821).<sup>3</sup> Arignotus had also been priest of Thyatira's patron deity, Apollo Tyrimnos, not to mention temple-warden in the imperial cult. The inscription also points out that his father and grandfather were high-priests of Asia in the provincial imperial cult.

As with the contacts between members of the Julian family and associations, the *content* of the connections between the dyers and influential persons in imperial positions entails benefactor-beneficiary (or patron-client) relations, and it is reciprocal in *directedness*. As an ongoing group formed from occupational social network connections, the dyers were able to secure access to limited resources of financial assistance from the wealthy, furthering their own interests in competition with other associations, groups, and individuals within Thyatira. So the exchange of material assistance for honors is once again a key purpose of a particular link.

Something I have not yet emphasized enough are the less tangible or symbolic purposes of such connections from the perspective of a local association like the dyers. An association's maintenance of ongoing relations with influential persons, some of whom also had important imperial ties, was not only a source of material or financial assistance. These relations were also a means by which an association could increase its own feeling of importance within the civic community. Associations set up an honorary monument or statue for a benefactor not only because such was required of them by the social conventions of benefaction, but also because advertising their own connections with highly respected individuals or families within the civic setting was a way of claiming their place within society, something I return to further below.

Overall, then, these connections tell us something about how the dyers found a place for themselves within the networks and hierarchies of the city. Imperial connections within civic life were a very important component in the external relations of associations, directly or indirectly connecting them with the social, cultic, and political structures of city, province, and empire. This point will become clearer as we consider the range of evidence for the interactions of other



Figure 38: Facsimile of the honorary monument erected by the dyers for Sokrates Sakerdotianos.

3 Arignotus had been prefect and then tribune of several cohorts in his career, taking him to numerous areas of the empire including Alexandria in Egypt, Trajanopolis in Cilicia, and Kyzikos in Asia, where he had also served as a temple-warden.

associations with imperial officials and, further on, with emperors.

### The Range and Forms of Participation in Networks

The picture of associations interacting with persons in a variety of imperial positions is not at all limited to the cases I have just outlined. There is a range of evidence for many associations interacting with influential persons, from those who assumed high-priesthoods in civic or provincial imperial cults to those of the equestrian and senatorial orders. Figure 39 provides an illustration of the range of connections, discussed here, between associations and persons at different levels within the civic and provincial elites.

Associations could have connections with functionaries of imperial cult temples. Most cities and towns of Asia included local civic temples or shrines devoted to the imperial family with accompanying priesthoods (often called “high-priesthoods” [*archiereis*], as in provincial imperial cults) or other offices taken on by the wealthier families. As I have noted, these temples were usually built under local initiative using funds donated by prominent families, and they were quite separate from those founded in connection with the provincial League of Asia.

Associations could honor officials connected with these municipal imperial cults, as the case of Julia Severa already demonstrated. In the first years of the common era, for instance, the civic institutions of Iasos joined together with both the organizations of young men and elders and the association of Roman businessmen to honor the priest of a local cult devoted to Agrippa Postumus (son of Augustus and Julia; *Iasos* 90). Associations of Hermes-, Aphrodite-, and Dionysos-devotees on the island of Nisyros (south of Kos) crowned Gnomagoras, a civic magistrate and “priest of the Augusti in Nisyros” who had also made benefactions to the city and its inhabitants (*IG XII,3* 104 = *AGRW* 246). There are similar connections with civic imperial priests and priestesses attested with initiates at Tralles, initiates of Dionysos Kallon (“the Beautiful”) at Byzantion, and a guild of linen-workers at Thyatira (*ITrall* 74; *IByzantion* 34 [late-I CE]; *TAM V* 933). This practice of praising priests was certainly not limited to civic cults in the province of Asia, as shown by inscriptions involving leather-workers at Termessos in Pamphylia, Roman businessmen at Isaura in Galatia, and dyers at Sagalassos in Lycia (*TAM III* 114 [223 CE], *IGR III* 292, *IGR III* 360 = *AGRW* 209 [II-III CE]).

More prestigious than the local or civic priesthoods were those organized and founded in connection with the provincial League of Asia. The earliest of these imperial cults was dedicated to Augustus and Roma at Pergamon (by 27 BCE) on the initiative of the provincial communities with recognition from Rome, as was customary. By the end of the first century of the principate there were similar temples at Smyrna (founded under Tiberius) and Ephesos (founded under Domitian). I have already discussed provincial celebrations associated with these cults in connection with the hymn-singers of Pergamon.

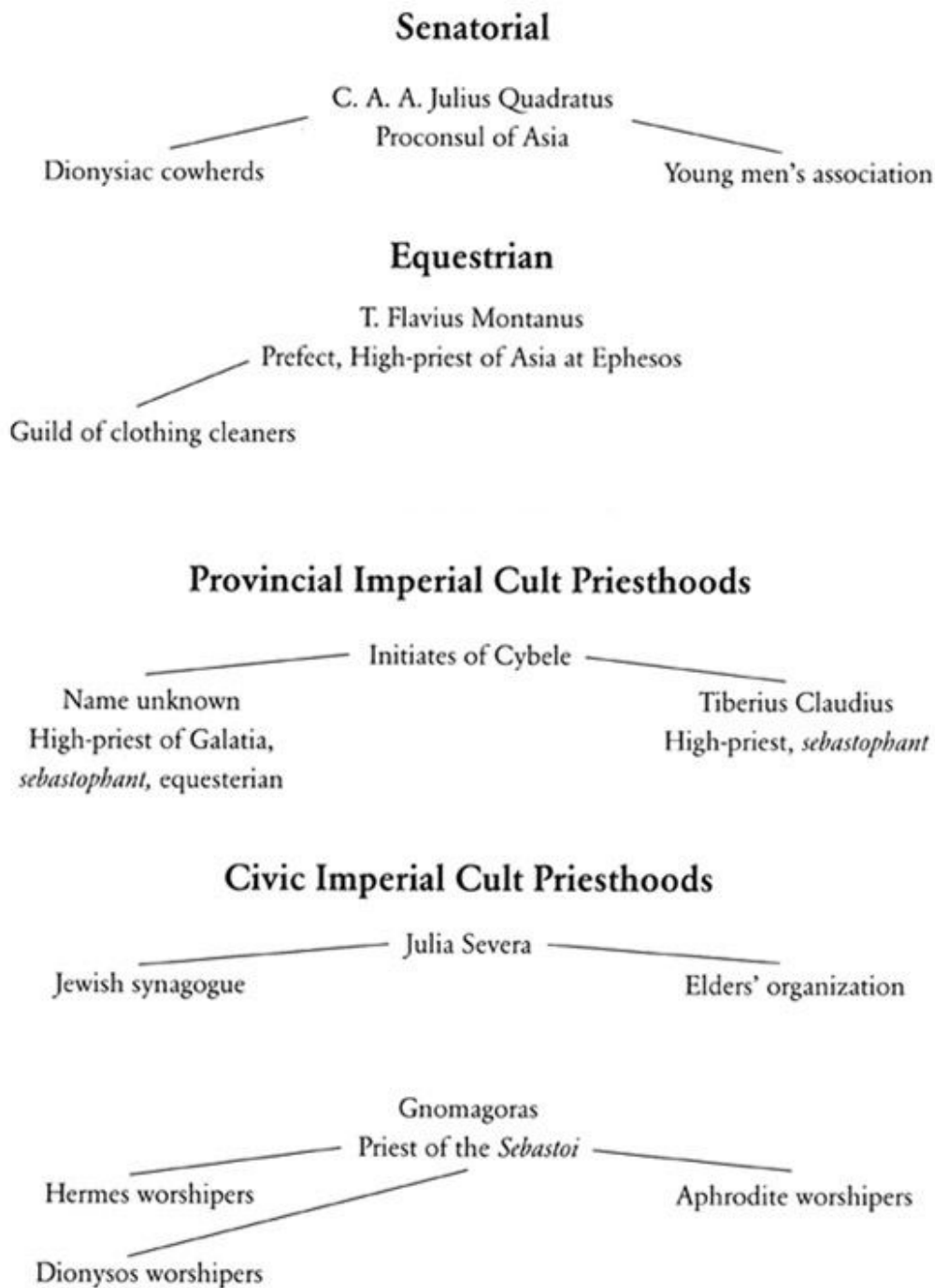


Figure 39: Diagram showing associations' connections with persons at different social levels.



Once again, it was not uncommon for associations to maintain contacts with these provincial high-priests or high-priestesses. The silversmiths at Ephesos, for example, honored T. Claudius Aristion (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 788), who was a high-priest of the imperial cult in the time of Domitian and also the secretary of the Ephesian people (*IEph* 425 + 636 = *AGRW* 164). Similarly, at Pessinous (near the border of Galatia and Asia) there was a group of initiates in the mysteries of Cybele who honored high-priests of the Galatian assembly, “revealers of the Augusti” (*sebastophantai*), and priests of Cybele or Attis (*IPessinous* 17 = *AGRW* 216; *IPessinous* 18; 150–200 CE).

An inscription from Thyatira involving C. Julius Xenon is worth discussing here (*TAM V* 1098 = *AGRW* 130; early-I CE). It reveals that a hero-cult had been founded in honor of Xenon after his death in view of his many contributions to Thyatira and the province during his life. And it seems that his time as high-priest in the provincial imperial cult at Pergamon was a key factor. Putting Thyatira on the provincial and imperial map in such an exceptional manner made this man deserving of heroic honors after his passing. The association devoted to him, the Juliasts (*Iuliastai*), set up a monument which clearly praised his roles as both benefactor and high-priest of Caesar Augustus and goddess Roma, stating that “he has done the greatest things for all Asia, being savior, benefactor and founder in every way and father of the fatherland, first among the Greeks.” Most often, however, associations maintained relations with imperial officials who had not yet departed from the scene.

A monument from Akmoneia (early-second century) involving a high-priest serves as a fitting transition to associations’ contacts with those of the equestrian order. It reads as follows: “To good fortune. The guild of clothing-cleaners erected this monument for T. Flavius Montanus, son of Hiero of the tribe of Quirina, prefect of the craftsmen, high-priest of Asia for the Asian assembly’s temple in Ephesos, revealer of the Augusti (*Sebastoi*), and director of contests for life” (*IPhrygR* 534 = *AGRW* 146).<sup>4</sup> As his prefecture suggests, Montanus was of the equestrian order and we also know that he belonged to an aristocratic family centred at Kibyra (south of Colossae, near the border with Lycia). Montanus’ sister, Flavia Lycia, married into a family with a long history of high-priesthoods in the provincial imperial cult (see Kearsley 1988, 43–46). Her father-in-law, T. Claudius Polemo (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 963), was a well-known rhetor and “leader of Asia” (*Asiarch*) of the equestrian order. Another guild, the leather-workers at Kibyra, honored Polemo in connection with a decree of the civic institutions (*IKibyra* 63; ca. 150 CE).

Other associations in Asia, including occupational groups, could maintain similar contacts with officials of the equestrian order, from army officials to legates and procurators. We have already encountered links with several equestrian officials in connection with the dyers at Thyatira, but there are other cases as well. The guild of clothing-cleaners (fullers) in first-century Temenothyrai (west of Akmoneia), for instance, honored as “founder” and “friend of the homeland” L. Egnatius Quartus, an equestrian military commander who had been prefect of a cohort and of military wings, as well as tribune of a legion (*AE* [1977] 227–28, no. 802; late-I CE). As assistants to the proconsul, the procurator (*epitropos*) of provincial Asia was an important official. Both the physicians at Ephesos (*IEph* 719 = *AGRW* 165; early-II CE) and the purple-dyers at Hierapolis (*IHierapJ* 42) also honored procurators.

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4 Montanus was also active as a benefactor at Ephesos (see *IEph* 2037, 2061, 2063).



The connections of associations could even extend to the senatorial order, that extremely small segment of society which, in theory, possessed the most power and influence. In the first years of the common era, for example, the people of Assos (north-west of Pergamon) joined together with the association of Roman businessmen to honor Augustus' grandson, Gaius, who was also consul (*IAssos* 13; 1–4 CE). On several occasions neighborhood associations at Pergamon set up an inscription for L. Cuspius Pactumeius Rufinus (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 1637), a senator who was consul in 142 CE, priest of Zeus Olympios at Pergamon, and also a member of the elite-association of “Arval Brothers” at Rome, as was Quadratus decades earlier (*IPergamon* 424; *IPergamon* 434; *IGR* IV 425 = *AGRW* 118). At Ephesos we encounter an association of businessmen honoring a praetor of the Roman people and legate of Caesar (*IEph* 738; I CE) and another group of merchants joining with the civic institutions to honor a senator of the famous Vedius family (*IEph* 3079; II CE; cf. *IEph* 727–28, 3075). Both the leather-tanners and a gymnastic organization at Thyatira honored as benefactor of the homeland a man of consular rank, M. Gnaeus Licinius Rufinus (*TAM* V 986, 987; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> L 236).

As the case of Quadratus and the Dionysiac cowherds showed, patronage connections could even extend to the highest and most influential Roman provincial official, the proconsul (*anthypatos*) of Asia. This was a position taken on only by senators who had reached the consulship in Rome. For instance, the merchants of the slave-market at Ephesos had set up a monument for their patron, C. Sallustius Crispus Passienus, who was proconsul in 42–43 CE (*IEph* 3025; *PIR*<sup>1</sup> P 109). In a subsequent chapter, I discuss groups of Judeans in Asia who also maintained important contacts with such imperial officials of the equestrian and senatorial orders, sometimes following usual custom among associations in setting up monuments in their honor.

### Other Tangible Benefits of Connections

Now that we have some idea of the range of possibilities for connections between associations and Roman officials, a few words on the nature of these positive interactions are in order. Besides the symbolic significance of monumental honors (which I elaborate below) there were also other more concrete aspects to these relations within social networks. We have already seen the most basic content of these links, namely a patron-client or benefactor-beneficiary relationship involving the exchange of material assistance for appropriate honors. Such reciprocal yet asymmetrical exchanges helped to ensure the maintenance of hierarchies within the social structures of society.

However, there is evidence from Asia Minor that hints at other non-material, though tangible, purposes of such contacts from the perspective of associations. Alongside other factors, these benefits help to explain why these connections existed. At the local level, for example, a guild's connections with a market-overseer or another official responsible for the distribution of shops could have very tangible benefits, such as assignment of a shop in a preferable location (e.g. *IEph* 444–445; *IEph* 2076–81; III CE; Knibbe 1985).

Positive links with influential persons were a potential source of other forms of support, including legal and other assistance for an association, as van Nijf (1997, 82–100) points out. Several papyri from Egypt show that guilds might require a legal advocate for a variety of reasons.

One case involves the clothing-cleaners and dyers of Tebtunis hiring a lawyer to protest over-taxation by an official (*PTebt* I 287; 161–69 CE). Another case involves the linen-merchants attempting to gain a higher price from the city of Oxyrhynchos for their provision of supplies for the making of vestments (*POxy* XII 1414; 270–75 CE). There are several instances in Asia Minor which apparently involve an association honoring an influential person who had or would act as such an advocate for the group, furthering its interests in legal or other contexts. The coppersmiths at Nikaia in Bithynia honored T. Flavius, “leader of Asia” (Asiarch), high-priest, property assessor, and “just advocate” (*p[r]oēgoran dika[ion]*; *INikaia* II.1 addend. 73\*; I–II CE). Similarly, a neighborhood association in the area of Nikaia set up a monument in the early second century for its benefactor and “avenger,” or legal representative (*egdikos*), “because of everything he had done,” probably relating to his success in a legal case on the association’s behalf (*INikaia* 1202; between 102–114 CE). On more than one occasion a guild of porters devoted to Demeter at Tarsos in Cilicia honored a patron, one a Roman consul, who had evidently been their helpful advocate (*syndikos*) in some matters (*IGR* III 883; *SEG* 27 [1977], no. 947; II–III CE).<sup>5</sup>

The maintenance of positive relations with Roman officials possessing considerable power and influence, such as a proconsul, might also come in handy in furthering particular aims of an association. We have already encountered the Ephesian Demeter-devotees, who repeatedly sought and gained recognition of their rites from officials, and I will discuss diplomatic practices among Judeans soon. Here an interesting inscription from Kyme will illustrate well the non-material, though tangible, content of interactions between officials and associations.

A few words of background on the inscription are in order before going on to see how the legal power and influence of the proconsul were solicited by a local Dionysiac association of Kyme (*IKyme* 17 = *AGRW* 103).<sup>6</sup> The wars that preceded the victory of Augustus at Actium and the heavy taxation levied by Brutus, Cassius, and Antony were quite devastating economically to the cities of western Asia Minor (Magie 1950, 418–40). One consequence of these circumstances was that sacred places and other properties in the cities were sometimes sold to individuals for their commercial value. It seems that as conditions in Asia stabilized after 31 BCE, partially by way of imperial aid, the cities became aware of just how many sacred places or other properties had passed into individual possession, as Robert K. Sherk (1969, 313–320) suggests. In the hopes of restoring these properties to the ownership of the gods or cities in question, cities in Asia, perhaps collectively, registered a complaint and sought a ruling from the Roman authorities, likely the senate. The official response to these requests from below was a ruling in 27 BCE by Augustus and Marcus Agrippa, then consuls, to the effect that sacred objects and places were not to be sold or given to any individuals. Furthermore, any such transactions that had taken place in the past were to be reversed by the governor’s restoring them to the possession of the god or city in question. A Greek translation of this document is preserved along with a proconsular letter in Latin ruling on a particular case, which is the inscription we are considering here.

This brings us to the situation at Kyme specifically, where one such sacred place, previously used by the members of a society (*thiasitai*) devoted to Dionysos (Liber Pater), had passed into the

5 Cf. Robert 1949b.

6 Also published by Pleket 1958, 49–66, no. 57 = Sherk 1969, 313–320, no. 61. Cf. Atkinson 1960; Oliver 1963; Millar 1977, 317–18.

possession of a man named Lysias. The circumstances which led to this transaction, as H.W. Pleket (1958, 56–57) argues, most likely involved the association seeking a loan from Lysias. Securing loans with immovable property, this time a temple, was common practice (cf. Strabo, *Geography* 13.3.5, also regarding Kyme). Apparently the association failed to pay the loan on time and Lysias refused to accept late payment, retaining the temple.

Finally we come to the association's interactions with the Roman proconsul of Asia as administrator of justice, which resulted in a decision in the association's favor. This provides an excellent example of the more tangible benefits that could come to an association by way of positive contacts with Roman officials in high places. Yet in this case we do not know for sure whether positive relations existed beforehand or whether honors for the official followed (but we can certainly imagine such). The association sent a member, Apollonides, as its ambassador to the proconsul in order to present the group's request "to restore the sacred objects to the god as Augustus Caesar has ordered, after having paid the price written on the temple of Liber Pater [i.e. Dionysos] by Lysias." Evidently, the association had heard of the official decision made by Augustus and Agrippa (probably within a year or two of its proclamation) and appealed to its provisions before the most powerful Roman official of the province.

L. Vinicius' favorable response in the case came in the form of a letter to the civic magistrates of Kyme, ordering that they look into the matter and, if the association's claims were correct, to ensure that Lysias received payment and handed over the sacred place into the possession of the god, Dionysos.<sup>7</sup> The members of the association, but likely others in Kyme also, once again had access to the place where they met to honor the god. Not surprisingly, they (or the city itself) had both Augustus' order and the proconsul's letter engraved on a monument which was set up for all to see at the temple in question. The members of this association were more than willing to follow the suggestion of the proconsul by inscribing the following: "Restored by emperor Caesar Augustus, son of the deified Julius." This brings us to the emperors and imperial family.

### Monumental Honors for Emperors and the Imperial Family

The "connections" of associations could extend to the most powerful figures within the empire and cosmos, the emperors and members of the imperial household. It was common convention for individuals, groups, institutions, and cities to honor the emperors or imperial family by dedicating monuments, statues, altars, and buildings to them, and all types of associations took part in these honors. The evidence regarding associations that has survived for the province of Asia includes dedications to specific emperors including Augustus (27 BCE–14 CE), Tiberius (14–37 CE), Claudius (41–54 CE), Nero (54–68 CE), Vespasian (69–79 CE), Domitian (81–96 CE), Trajan (98–117 CE), Hadrian (117–138 CE), Antoninus Pius (138–61 CE), Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (161–69 CE), Commodus (176–92 CE), and Caracalla (198–217 CE), but also dedications to the more general category of the "revered ones" (*Sebastoi* or *Augusti*). Here I focus primarily on monumental honors from the well-excavated site of Ephesos, making reference to similar material attested elsewhere in

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7 See Pleket (1958, 61–62) and Sherk (1969, 319–20) on the identity of the proconsul, probably [L.] Vinicius, consul suffect in 33 BCE.

Asia Minor which suggests that the associations of Ephesos were not an exception in honoring the emperors and imperial family.



*Figure 40: Round statue base for Isis dedicated in the toll-booth for the fish-market (IEph 1503 = RICIS 304/0608).*

Associations could be on the receiving end of benefactions that were dedicated to the emperors alongside other institutions and gods. In the mid-second century, a wealthy woman named Kominia Junia set up a statue of Isis for the workers in the fishery toll-office, dedicating the statue to Artemis, the Ephesians, and Antoninus Pius (*IEph* 1503 = *AGRW* 169 [138–61 CE]; see figure 40).<sup>8</sup> A few decades later in the city of Rome M. Ulpius Domesticus, a famous athlete and leader of an athletic association, erected statues dedicated to Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius and to a society of Ephesian shippers and merchants (*IGUR* 26).<sup>9</sup> Altars could also be dedicated to the emperors in connection with an association. An altar at Ephesos which was dedicated “to the Augustan (*Sebastoi*) gods and the initiates” by Sarapion and his family (*IEph* 1506) has its counterpart at Hierapolis, involving a “sacred society (*thiasos*)” (*SEG* 33 [1983], no. 1135; cf. *IErythrai* 132; mid-II CE). Similar practices can be found outside the walls of the Greek city in the villages of the countryside. The village of Azoulenon (?), near Ephesos, honored the “joyful-celebration association” (*tēn synbiōsin tōn Euēmeriōn*) by dedicating a structure to both the ancestral gods and the Augustan gods (*IEph* 3817; see Robert 1937, 65–66). The devotees of Zeus Bennios in a village near Aizanoi dedicated their altar on behalf of emperor Trajan (*SEG* 40 [1990], no. 1229), which brings me to more proactive group involvement in such honorary activities.

Associations were not only among the recipients of benefactions dedicated to the emperors. They were also active initiators of monumental honors. The group (*conventus*) of Roman businessmen at Ephesos which set up two monuments (probably statues) for Claudius (*IEph* 409; *IEph* 3019) was reflecting common practice among other associations of this type, as inscriptions from Assos, Sebaste, Akmoneia, Apameia, and Pergamon show.<sup>10</sup> Yet these honorary activities for the emperors were certainly not limited to these immigrants from Rome or Italy.

We have already encountered the association of fishermen and fish-dealers who built the fishery toll-office near the harbor at Ephesos and dedicated it to Nero, Nero’s mother, his wife, the Roman people, and the Ephesian people (*IEph* 20; 54–59 CE). The practice of dedicating buildings and meeting-places to the emperors is well-attested elsewhere, too. At Thyatira, a group of merchants dedicated their work-shops to the Augustan (*Sebastoi*) gods (*TAM V* 862), and the Nikomedian shippers in Bithynia dedicated their sanctuary and meeting-place to Vespasian (*TAM IV* 22).

8 Cf. *IEph* 586 (II CE); *IPerinthos* 56 = *AGRW* 64 (196–98 CE; Thracia).

9 Domesticus, a Roman citizen, could also boast of citizenship at Ephesos, Antinoopolis, and Athens (*IG V,1* 669 [Sparta]); he was the high-priest and ambassador to the emperors for the athletic association devoted to Herakles (see *IGUR* 235–238; *IEph* 1089). As William C. West (1990) points out, it seems that the original headquarters of this athletic association was in Asia, most likely at Ephesos (cf. *IEph* 1084, 1089, 1098).

10 *IAssos* 19 (Livia, Augustus’ wife, as the “new Hera”); *IPhyrgR* 474, 511 (Sebaste, Domitian); *MAMA VI* 177 (Akmoneia, Vespasian); *MAMA VI* 183 (Apameia); Conze and Schuchhardt 1899, 173, no. 16 (Pergamon, time of Augustus).

Years later, at Ephesos, we find another association dedicating a monument both to its patron deity, Dionysos, and to Trajan (*IEph 3329* = *AGRW* 166). Here the emperor himself is referred to as “a member of the society (*thiasōtēs*),” an honorary member of the Dionysiac association.<sup>11</sup> Apparently this association liked to think that it had a particularly close connection with Trajan, whose comments to Pliny opened our present chapter. Other inscriptions from Ephesos involving Dionysiac initiates and both Hadrian and Commodus likewise show the importance of monumental honors for the emperors, as well as cultic honors (*IEph 275* = *AGRW* 168 [119 CE]; *IEph 293* = *AGRW* 173). Dionysiac associations elsewhere engaged in similar practices. The initiates of Dionysos Breseus at Smyrna, for instance, praisingly addressed Hadrian as “Olympios, savior and founder” on one of its monuments (*ISmyrna 622* = *AGRW* 191 [ca. 129–31 CE]).

The links implied in the monumental honors discussed so far are primarily indirect. Often the association involved was far more aware of its “connections” than were the emperors named as recipients of the honors. This differs from what we found in the case of other Roman imperial officials and cultic functionaries, who were usually very much aware of the honors set up for them, often in return for very specific benefactions, services or actions of support. However, there were some occasions when honors might be communicated to the emperor himself by way of the regular means of diplomacy, the sending of an embassy to the emperor who might then reply with a rescript or letter. Diplomatic practices similar to those of cities and leagues were more common among somewhat official associations of athletes and performers, which are not our present focus.<sup>12</sup> Still, there were occasions when other associations, including Judean groups that I discuss in a subsequent chapter, might engage in similar diplomatic conventions involving more direct relations with emperors.

The initiates of Dionysos Breseus at Smyrna provide an example of a group maintaining ongoing diplomatic ties with emperors. One inscription preserves letters of response to this “synod” from both Marcus Aurelius and Antoninus Pius (*ISmyrna 600* = *AGRW* 192).<sup>13</sup> Only the opening of the latter is legible. The former letter involves the future emperor Marcus Aurelius, then consul for the second time (ca. 158 CE), responding to the initiates who had sent a copy of their honorary decree by way of the proconsul, T. Statilius Maximus. Aurelius’ response to the decree, which dealt with the association’s celebration at the birth of his son, acknowledges the good-will of the initiates even though his son had since died. That these diplomatic contacts continued when Aurelius was emperor with Lucius Verus (see figure 41) is shown in a fragmentary letter from these emperors to the same group around 161–163 CE, perhaps in response to further honors (*ISmyrna 601*).

The associations that did maintain such direct diplomatic relations with the emperors themselves were very sure to advertise these connections. Yet in many cases associations honored the emperors without expectation of direct acknowledgement by way of correspondence with the honoree. This might lead us to ask what exactly was going on when associations set up a monument involving honors for the emperors or imperial family?

11 On the Aegean island of Thera (*OGIS* 735), a royal official and his wife were similarly made honorary members of a society (*thiasōtai*).

12 Cf. Millar 1977, 456–463; *IEph* 22; *GCRE* 27–28, 37 = *PLond* 1178 (Egypt).

13 Cf. Krier 1980; Petzl 1983.



*Figure 41: Bust of a young Lucius Verus, now in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen.*



## **The Symbolic Significance of Monumentalizing: Claiming a Place within Society and the Cosmos**

Acts of monumentalizing also had symbolic significance, which further demonstrates the importance of the emperors for the cultural life of associations. Since Ramsay MacMullen's article on the "epigraphic habit" in 1982, some scholars are turning their attention towards explaining the nature and significance of the epigraphic phenomenon and the visual messages of monuments for what they can tell us about society and the behavior of actors within it, whether they be communities, groups, or individuals.<sup>14</sup> A discussion of the purposes and meanings of monumentalizing will help to clarify the nature of associations' relations with emperors. Yet this will also put into perspective our earlier discussion of honors for other imperial functionaries.

Greg Woolf's (1996) work on "epigraphic culture" provides a useful starting point with respect to the significance of monumentalizing. Woolf looks at the uses and significance of monumental inscriptions, arguing that they can be viewed as statements regarding the place of individuals and groups within society. We need not accept his theory regarding the social settings that led to the predominance of the epigraphic habit, however. He attempts to link the popularity of monumentalizing with supposed widespread feelings of social dislocation and anxiety which coincided with the "rise of individualism," depending on assumptions which I challenged in part one. Nevertheless, his observations on the meaning of acts of monumentalizing, seeing them as "claims about the world" (Woolf 1996, 27), are very insightful and applicable to situations involving associations.

According to Woolf (1996, 29), "the primary function of monuments in the early Empire was as devices with which to assert the place of individuals [communities or other collectivities] within society." Those who set up a monument were in a very concrete manner, literally set in stone, attempting to symbolically preserve a particular set of relations within society and the cosmos for others to observe. The visual and textual components of epigraphy "provided a device by which individuals [or groups] could write their public identities into history, by fixing in permanent form their achievements and their relations with gods, with men [sic], with the Empire, and with the city" (Woolf 1996, 39). The location of the monument could also be an important factor: most desired for visibility would be prestigious structures, such as theaters, market-places, and civic or provincial temples. Monumentalizing, then, was one way in which groups, such as associations, could express where they fit not only within society as we would understand it, but also within the broader cosmic framework that existed within the world view of persons living in that society.

Closely related to this is the sense of belonging which these assertions of place could provide for those involved in setting up an inscription, altar, statue or other monument. By participating in such honorary activities set in stone, MacMullen (1982, 246) states, people may have "felt themselves members of a special civilization." More importantly with regard to the cosmic framework, Mary Beard (1991, 37) points out that writing on monuments symbolically "played a central role in defining the nature of human relations with the divine, and indeed the nature of

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14 See MacMullen 1982, 1986; Millar 1983; Meyer 1990; Woolf 1996.

pagan deities themselves.” An altar, building, or other inscribed monument could be a statement of one’s “position in relation to a deity” (Beard 1991, 48).

In light of all this, we can begin to see the symbolic meaning of *associations*’ honors for and connections with both the emperors and other imperial-connected individuals and families. First, a few words about some cosmological issues peculiar to the emperors are in order. Among the honorary inscriptions of Asia, there were cases when an association’s dedication explicitly spoke of the emperors or imperial family in terms of their position within the cosmos as the Augustan (*Sebastoi*) gods. By participating in this aspect of life, associations were making claims regarding their own role in the upkeep of fitting relations within the cosmos, contributing towards the well-being of the larger civic community in which they belonged. Yet such monuments for the imperial gods could also be an indirect assertion of belonging within broader ritual contexts, within imperial cults at both civic and provincial levels. In this connection, the relations with imperial cult functionaries likewise tell of how some associations could express in a concrete way their sense of belonging within these specific contexts.

Monumental honors for the emperors also involved other more down-to-earth claims regarding an association’s place within society. A monument erected by an association set in stone for all to see the group’s connections, whether real or imagined, and advertised that group’s role within the nexus of relations that linked inhabitants to the civic community and the city to province and empire. In this sense, it did not matter whether or not a particular emperor was aware that a guild of merchants at Thyatira dedicated its building to his family or that the head of a Dionysiac association at Pergamon set up an altar in the emperor’s honor. What was more important was the association’s own notions of importance within society, and the perceptions that others in the civic community might begin to have regarding that group’s status within the city.

We have already discussed the more literal links between associations and imperial officials along with the non-symbolic characteristics of these connections. Yet some similar points regarding the symbolic significance of monuments could be said in these cases, too. The dyers or Dionysiac cowherds, for instance, literally maintained contacts with benefactors of the equestrian or senatorial order. Expressing these contacts in the form of a monument ensured that the prestige and social propriety implied by these momentous occasions would not be forgotten. It made a clear assertion regarding the association’s active participation within the webs of sociopolitical ties and hierarchies of the Greek city under Roman rule.

## Conclusion

The bulk of surviving epigraphic evidence from Roman Asia suggests that connections with and honors for both imperial officials and the emperors was a normal part of life for many, though not necessarily all, associations and guilds in the first two centuries. This evidence for positive interaction speaks of the tendency towards the integration of many associations (representing various social levels) within the city and helps to explain how the structures and hierarchies of society were maintained under Roman rule. Involvement in imperial dimensions of civic life was one of the ways in which an association could claim a place for itself within society and the

cosmos. I soon turn to the question of how this picture of associations may shed light on the participation or non-participation of Judean synagogues and Christian congregations in imperial and other dimensions of civic life. And we will find that such a comparison can tell us something important about the place of these groups, alongside other associations, within society in Roman Asia Minor. But before we engage in such comparison, negative dimensions of group-society relations involving associations need to be put into perspective.



## 6 / PUTTING TENSIONS AND OFFICIAL INTERVENTION IN PERSPECTIVE

### Introduction

Talk of the integration of associations within society in Roman Asia Minor, no matter how important or neglected by scholars, must not lead us to believe that the cities were free from social conflicts and disturbances, disturbances in which associations could occasionally become involved. By its very nature, epigraphic evidence often (though not always) preserves for posterity the positive dimensions of social relations, so we need to remain aware of negative interaction as well.

Yet there has been a tendency for scholars to give priority to literary or legal evidence, especially those few passages involving Roman officials' controlling actions against associations, to the neglect of the inscriptional evidence for associations which I have discussed so far.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, the impression one might wrongly get from reading scholarship in this area is that tensions, disturbances, and resulting imperial intervention were at the center of association life generally. Assumptions that Roman officials attempted to strictly control associations throughout the empire—that their relations with such groups were primarily, if not solely negative—can be found throughout scholarship unfamiliar with or uninterested in the ongoing interactions I have just presented, including influential scholars from Jean-Pierre Waltzing (1895–1900) and Francesco M. de Robertis (1971 [1938]) to G.E.M. de Ste. Croix (1981).

This widespread characterization of associations in terms of conflict with society also finds expression among scholars of early Christianity. Paul J. Achtemeier (1996, 25–26), for instance, correctly looks to associations for understanding the social world of the early Jesus movements (1 Peter specifically); yet he oversimplifies his portrait of associations in stating that they “were subject to official scrutiny” and were a “constant problem to the governing authorities.”<sup>2</sup> Achtemeier, like other scholars, says little if anything of evidence concerning positive dimensions of group-society relations.

Contrary to the assumptions of some scholars, however, civic unrest involving associations which led to the intervention of Roman officials was intermittent, pertaining to the particularities of time and place. This fell far short of repression or strict enforcement of legislation in the provinces. When such disturbances involving associations did occur, they would usually be handled locally, which is in keeping with the character of Roman rule generally. Rarely would Roman imperial officials in a pacified province need to become directly involved in controlling actions against local associations.

Moreover, occasional disturbances involving associations and subsequent imperial control must be viewed in light of the evidence for associations' participation in networks of benefaction and the general desire to secure a place within city and empire. Sporadic incidents requiring resolution

1 Secondary literature on control of associations and legal questions is vast, and cannot be dealt with fully here. See, for example, Liebenam 1890; Waltzing 1895–1900; Kornemann 1901; Radin 1910; Carolsfeld 1969 [1933]; Duff 1938; Cotter 1996. For a discussion of how legal questions have (often detrimentally) dominated the study of associations, see Ausbüttel 1982, 11–16.

2 Cf. Reicke 1951; Balch 1981, 65–80; Stanley 1996, 120. Contrast Judge 1960, 43.

were a natural outcome of a competitive culture, and we should not speak of associations as anti-Roman or subversive sects because of their occasional involvement in such agonistic incidents. Nor would Judean synagogues and Christian congregations, *as associations at least*, be automatically considered subversive or sectarian in this sense. The following discussion of incidents in Italy and Asia Minor will illustrate this point and further clarify the nature of Roman authorities' relations with associations, concluding with the Pliny correspondance mentioned earlier.

### Politics and Associations in Italy and the City of Rome

Most of the evidence for the occasional control of associations (*collegia*) by Roman authorities relates to Rome and nearby regions of Italy. Even then, this material pertains to broader concerns regarding the maintenance of public order or other political issues, not the ongoing legal control of associations *per se* by Roman officials.<sup>3</sup>

Livy's lively account of the Bacchanalian affair of 186 BCE was written in the time of Augustus (Livy, *History of Rome* 39.8-19 = *AGRW* L23). It relates the story of how politicians (consuls and the Roman senate) were distracted from their business by a "conspiracy at home" involving Dionysiac associations:

[A] Greek of humble origin . . . was the hierophant of secret ceremonies performed at night. There were initiations which at first were imparted only to a few; but they soon began to be widespread among men and women. The pleasures of drinking and feasting were added to the religious rites . . . When wine had inflamed their feelings, and night and the mingling of the sexes . . . had extinguished all power of moral judgment, all sorts of corruption began to be practiced. . . . [T]he cult was also a source of supply of false witnesses, forged documents and wills, and perjured evidence, dealing also in poisons and in wholesale murders among the devotees. . . . [T]he violence was concealed because no cries for help could be heard against the shriekings, the banging of drums, and the clashing of cymbals in the scene of debauchery and bloodshed . . . This evil, with all its disastrous influence, spread from Etruria to Rome like an epidemic (*History of Rome* 39.8-9, 13; trans. by Bettenson 1976).

Once in Rome, these "degraded and alien rites" started by a lower-class upstart spread and came to involve murder and intrigue within elite circles ("some men and women of rank were to be found among them"), which seems to be among Livy's main concerns (cf. 39.13). The result was a special investigation by the consuls (the two highest, annually chosen officials for the city of Rome) followed by a decree of the Roman senate to the effect that "no one who had been initiated into the Bacchic rites should attempt to assemble or meet for the purpose of holding these ceremonies or to perform any such religious rite" (39.14), both in Rome and in the surrounding towns of Italy (cf. *ILLRP* 511). Once the initial investigations and punishments took place, Livy points out, those who wished to engage in honors for the god Bacchus (= Dionysos) in Rome or Italy needed to gain permission to do so from a city official (praetor) and the senate (39.18).

We cannot fully deal with the nature of this incident here, which has been thoroughly

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3 On associations and politics, also see Fellmeth 1987, 1990.

researched by others.<sup>4</sup> Suffice it to say that various factors, other than the control of associations as such, were at play in leading the senate to take action in controlling these groups. Among them were accusations of criminal activities (including attempted murder) on the part of specific members in these associations, issues regarding a foreign cult's in-roads into the Roman aristocracy, and the senate's attempt to extend its political authority in Italy. Most importantly here, Erich Gruen (1990, 39) points out "how extraordinary and exceptional . . . the features of this episode [are] in Roman cultural and institutional history." The Roman officials' active suppression of Dionysiac associations during this Bacchanalian affair was *not* typical of ongoing Roman policy in relation to associations, Dionysiac or otherwise.<sup>5</sup>

There is further evidence for the political involvement of associations in the late-republican era (before 27 BCE when Augustus became emperor). It is important to keep in mind the background of many of these earliest examples of Roman officials' involvements with associations, as well as the motivations and biases of those who happen to report these involvements to us. The last century of the republic was a particularly volatile age with regard to politics at Rome as senators strove to secure power over against others, and there were times when the support of associations (*collegia*, the most common Latin term) was solicited by certain politicians. So when Cicero and C. Antonius narrowly beat Catiline in elections for consulship (64 BCE), the senate was sure to pass a decree abolishing "all guilds which appeared to conflict with public interest," namely, any that supported Catiline and other opponents of the new consuls.<sup>6</sup>

Several years later, the tribune Clodius together with the consuls allowed or even encouraged the political use of *collegia* once again, probably because it was to their own advantage at the time (Cicero, *Against Piso* 8-9 = *AGRW* L26; *For Sestius* 33-34 = *AGRW* L25). Cicero condemns this action by Clodius, equating the *collegia* in question with bands of brigands or bandits. Yet this contrasts strongly to Cicero's own attitudes towards those *collegia* that happened to support him instead. So, in a speech after his return from exile, Cicero positively states that there "is no *collegium* in this city . . . that did not pass resolutions in the most generous terms supporting not only my restoration, but my dignity" (*On His House* 74).<sup>7</sup>

Similar motivations appear to underlie Julius Caesar's dissolution of "all *collegia* except those of ancient foundation" while securing his power in 47-46 BCE (Suetonius, *Julius* 42 = *AGRW* L32; cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.213-16 = *AGRW* L33). As Jerzy Linderski (1995) argues, this action involved disbanding particular groups viewed as a threat to Caesar's maintenance of power in Rome. There is no evidence that this involved a law which henceforth ensured the strict control of associations throughout the empire, as de Robertis and others assume.<sup>8</sup>

Evidently, associations could come into contact with Roman officials within the political arena at the capital, especially in the closing decades of the republic. But whether such involvement was considered subversive, requiring some intervention, was in the eyes of the beholder and subject to

4 For discussions in recent decades, see North 1979; Rousselle 1982; Gruen 1990, 34-78; Walsh 1996.

5 Cf. Liu 2005, 282.

6 Asconius, *Commentary on Against Piso* 7 = *AGRW* L29; cf. Cicero, *Against Piso* 9 = *AGRW* L26; *Speech Delivered to the Senate upon Return from Exile* 33 = *AGRW* L28; ca. 57 BCE.

7 Trans. by Bailey 1991. Cf. Quintus Cicero, *A Handbook on Election Strategy* 8.29-30

8 Cf. Yavetz 1983 [1979], 86, 94-95.



the political climate of the time. In these cases, as in others, we *cannot* say that most Roman officials were opposed to associations in general. Similar things can be said of the imperial period.

The actions of Octavian, soon to be Augustus (who was emperor from 27 BCE–14 CE), in the late 30s BCE are worth some discussion here. According to Suetonius, Octavian made special efforts to eliminate the many “anti-social practices that endangered public order” in Italy which were a “legacy of the civil wars,” especially brigandage or banditry (*Divine Augustus* 32 = *AGRW* L34). Suetonius relates that gangs of brigands roamed the countryside and:

many groups (*factiones*) formed societies (*societates*) bearing the title of a new association (*titulo collegi novi*) to commit nothing that was not outrageous. Therefore [Augustus] restrained the brigandage by stationing guards wherever it seemed opportune, he inspected the workhouses, and dissolved the associations (*collegia*), except those that were long standing and formed for legitimate purposes (*antiqua et legitima*).  
(*Divine Augustus* 32.1–2 = *AGRW* L34).

Scholars who follow Mommsen and Waltzing interpret this passage as a reference to the institution of an actual law, which these scholars label the *lex Iulia de collegiis*, and a recent study by Andreas Bendlin (2011) attempts to revive certain aspects of this theory. According to these scholars, this law made it necessary for associations to gain official permission from the Roman senate in order to exist, a requirement which continued to influence control of associations for the next two centuries.<sup>9</sup> The senatorial decree found in some inscriptions of Italy in the second century (e.g. *CIL* XIV 2112 [ca. 136 CE]), in this view, was in large part a reiteration of a system of control over such groups that had been in effect since the time of Augustus.

However, this interpretation, including the notion that there even was an Augustan *lex Iulia* regarding *collegia* specifically, rests on slim evidence and certainly reads far too much into the passage in Suetonius, as both Max Radin and, more recently, Jinyu Liu note.<sup>10</sup> Suetonius seems rather to indicate that Octavian, like others in the late republican period, was concerned primarily with controlling “brigandage” and similar activities, namely bands of people with apparently subversive aims (“to commit nothing that was not outrageous”) that took on the name of an “association” (*collegium*) in order to lessen the potential for negative attention. It seems that these were gangs with ties to local men of power engaging in activities subversive to Octavian’s attempts to establish stability in Rome and its vicinity at this turbulent time. A comparison with Appian’s account of the same period further suggests that brigandage and related activities were the primary issue leading to Octavian’s measures in this case (Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.132 = *AGRW* L35; see Shaw 1984, 33–34). There is nothing in the passages in Suetonius or Appian that implies that Octavian was initiating some comprehensive law which involved control of ordinary guilds and associations in Italy, let alone the empire, from that time forward. Furthermore, the only early inscriptional reference that Mommsen adduced as a supposed reference to this *lex Iulia de collegiis* involves mention of a *lex Iulia* (without the descriptor “*de collegiis*”) in connection with a college of musicians (*collegio symphonicorum*) which participated in an official civic cult (*qui sacris publicis*

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9 Mommsen 1843; Waltzing 1895–1900, 1.115–16. Cf. La Piana 1927, 239–45; Bendlin 2011.

10 Cf. Radin 1910, 91–94; Liu 2005, 290–294.

*praestu sunt*; CIL VI 4416).<sup>11</sup> This inscription may be better interpreted within the context of Augustus' attempts to be seen supporting or acknowledging the revival of traditional cults, and it is not clear that the Julian law in question (there are several known *lex Iuliae* in the sources) actually pertained to controlling the gatherings of *collegia* specifically.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, ambiguity arises from the abbreviation that was used in this inscription, which makes it hard to know what the senate was granting permission for, whether the right for the musicians to gather or convene (*convocare* or *convenire*), the right to maintain their status or existence (*constitutere*), or something else (*quibus senatus c. c. c. permisit*, with different options for expanding the abbreviation).<sup>13</sup> The connection between the Suetonius passage, this inscription citing a senatorial decree, and the regulation of associations is quite tenuous.<sup>14</sup>



Figure 42: Fresco of the fighting scene in the amphitheater in Pompeii, now in the Naples Archaeological Museum.

Another very specific disturbance that came to involve Roman authorities occurred during the principate of Nero (54–68 CE). According to Tacitus' account, a riot broke out between inhabitants

11 CIL VI 4416: Dis Manibus | collegio symphonialcorum qui sacris publilcis praestu sunt, quibus | senatus c. c. c. permisit e | lege Iulia ex auctoritate | Aug(usti) ludorum causa.

12 Cf. Duff 1938, 109; Liu 2005, 292.

13 See Bendlin (2011, 237 n.67) for the different reconstructions.

14 Cf. Duff 1938, 109; Liu 2005, 291–292.

from Nuceria and those from Pompeii during a gladiatorial show at Pompeii in 59 CE (Tacitus, *Annals* 14.17 = *AGRW* L39):

About the same time, a trivial incident led to terrible slaughter between the inhabitants of the colonies of Nuceria and Pompeii, at a gladiatorial games presented by Livineius Regulus, who, as I have related, had been removed from the Senate. During an exchange quite typical of impudent small towns, they began with abusive language against each other, then stones, and then steel weapons. The people of Pompeii, where the show was taking place, gained superiority. Therefore, a number of Nucerians were carried to the city [Rome] with their bodies mutilated by wounds, while many lamented the deaths of children or parents. The emperor entrusted the judgment of the case to the Senate, and the Senate assigned it to the consuls. When the case was again referred back to the Fathers [i.e., senators], the people of Pompeii were forbidden from having such public gatherings for ten years, and all associations (*collegia*) formed in defiance of the laws were dissolved. Livineius and the others who had formented the disturbance were punished with exile.<sup>15</sup>

Tacitus' account shows that some associations (*collegia*) played a key role in instigating the inter-city battle, which was clearly a manifestation of civic pride. Civic pride happened to escalate into violence on this occasion. It seems that this scene is depicted in a wall-painting from Pompeii (from House I, 3, 23), which is now in the Naples National Archaeological Museum (see figure 42). Helene H. Tanzer's sketch of this same fresco draws out some details, where spectators are pictured battling one another in and around the amphitheater (see figure 43). A graffito by a patriotic Pompeian, which may be connected with this incident, depicts a gladiator bearing the palm of victory with the caption: "Men of the Campania region, you were destroyed by us in the same victory with the Nucerians" (Tanzer 1939, 72-74; see the sketch in figure 44).

This violent incident, which was clearly out of the control of the civic authorities, was considerable enough to warrant a special investigation on Nero's instruction. According to Tacitus, the Roman senate banned gladiator shows at Pompeii for ten years, dissolved the associations involved, and exiled both the sponsor of the show and those who instigated the disorder. Once again, it is within the context of maintaining public order (as the Roman authorities understood it) that specific associations from Pompeii and Nuceria encountered such controlling action. Most associations would continue to function openly and undisturbed. The involvement of groups of craftsmen and other associations (including Isis-devotees) in supporting

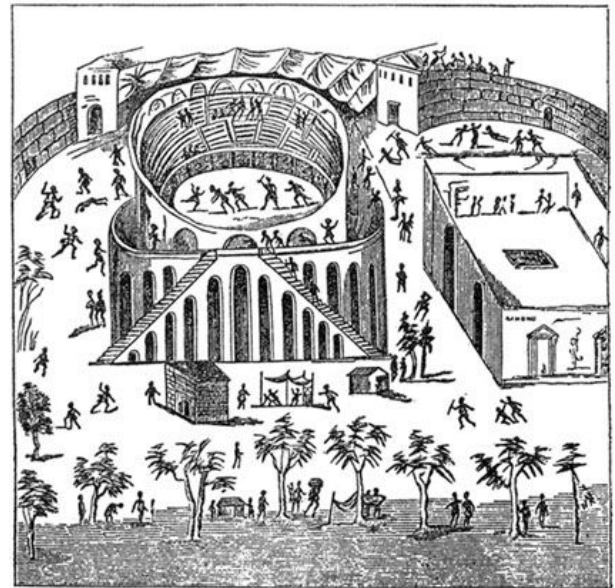


Figure 43: Drawing of the fresco by Helene H. Tanzer (1939, 72).

15 For a recent discussion of this passage and of *collegia* in Pompeii, see Liu 2008.

political candidates at Pompeii about a decade or so later (in the 70s CE) confirms that this incident under Nero did not have a significant impact on the lives of associations or guilds in the town.<sup>16</sup> In the main, associations in the cities of Italy, as elsewhere, would not face such governmental repression on a day to day basis.

Evidence concerning control of associations in the West in the final decades of the first century CE has recently surfaced. When the first edition of the present work was written, the implications of this recent discovery of a municipal law from Hispania Baetica (one of the three provinces of Spain) for the study of *collegia* in Romanized towns in the western provinces was only beginning (it was discovered in 1981).<sup>17</sup> Although coming from beyond Italy, this deserves some attention here since it bears on the regulation of assembly in Romanized towns in the West and, potentially, on local control of associations in connection with imperial concerns in Italy and elsewhere. Chapter 74 of the municipal law from the Romanized town of Flavium Irnitum, the so-called *lex Irnitana*, reads as follows:

Rubric. Concerning assembly, society, and college (*De coetu sodalicio collegio*). No one is to take part in an assembly (*coetus*) in that municipium or to form a society (*sodalitium*) or college (*collegium*) for that purpose or to conspire that it be held or to act in such a way that any of these things occur. Anyone who acts against these rules is to be condemned to pay 10,000 sesterces to the citizens of the Municipium Flavium Irnitum. And the right of action, suit, and claim of that money and concerning that money is to belong to any citizen of that municipium.<sup>18</sup>

Liu addresses the question of whether this law, which proposes fines for those who form an association illegally, reflects a more broadly applied imperial ideology or policy with respect to associations. In other words, did the law about assembly in this Spanish town build upon an imperial precedent, a Roman imperial law that was sometimes adapted and implemented at the civic



Figure 44: Drawing of the graffito from Pompeii by Tanzer (1939, 74).

16 See Franklin 1980 and Andringa 2009, 325–339.

17 Now see Liu (2005) who also notes a more ambiguous passage from the *lex Coloniae Genetivae* (47/46 BCE) which pertains to regulation of assembly. But these two are the only municipal laws that attempt to regulate assembly in some way so far (see Liu 2005, 282–283).

18 Trans. by Liu 2005, 280, based on that of Crawford. The Latin text reads: R(ubrica). De coetu sodalicio collegio. | Ne quis in e[o] municipio coetum facito, neve sodalici[um] conlelgiumve eius rei causa{m} habeto, neve habeatur coniurato | neve facito quo quid earum rerum fiat. Qui adversus ea felcerit, municip[ibus] municipi Flavi Irnitani HS X(milia) d(are) d(amnas) esto, eius | que pecuniae [de]que ea pecunia municipi eius municipi | qui volet, [c]uique per ha<n>c leg<m> licebit, actio petitio persecutio | esto.

level in provinces such as those in Spain? On this point, Liu (2005, 300–304) argues in the negative, noting that we lack any imperial pronouncements, actions, or laws concerning *collegia* which involve the imposition of fines as envisioned in the law at Irnitanum. Instead, the passages in the *Digest* that deal with the punishment for groups whose activities were considered illicit propose not fines, but dissolution (as was also the case with the associations that were involved in the disturbance at Pompeii, for instance). The following is attributed to Marcianus, who reflects legal theory in the time of the emperor Alexander Severus (222–235 CE):

If associations (*collegia*) are unlawful (*illicita*), they will be dissolved in accordance with the imperial mandates and constitutions and the decrees of the Senate. When they are dissolved, the members are allowed to divide among themselves the money held in common, if there is any of money in common (*Digest* 47.22.3 = *AGRW* L54).

There seems to be no *imperial* legal precedent for the imposition of fines for illegal association, and the local municipal law in this Spanish town is by no means the model for what happened in other towns of Italy or the provinces. Both Liu and Arnaoutoglou (2005) do cite and deal with an entry in a collection of local regulations from first century Egypt, a passage that does also involve fines. *Gnomon* 108 reads as follows: “Those belonging to a [sy]nod ([sy]nodos) were fined 500 drachmas, sometimes only the head officers (*prostatai*)” (trans. Arnaoutoglou 2005, 210). This ambiguous passage does not seem to relate to imperial legislation, but rather locally developed regulations. Arnaoutoglou (2005, 209–212) suggests the possibility that it may have to do with failure of associations to comply with financial obligations, rather than being a general law about association. Local conditions varied from place to place, as did the approach of local authorities to the associations.

The legal sources assembled in the sixth-century collection known as the *Digest* provide further evidence concerning Roman law and associations, especially with regard to Italy. There are several main sections pertaining to associations or *collegia*, one of which I have just cited (also see those collected in *AGRW* L43–L52). Although we cannot fully discuss the history of this legislation, it is important to make a few observations here, particularly concerning the nature and dates of the documents and the extent of their application or lack of application. One difficulty that should be noted at the outset is that it is not clear to what degree the materials collected in the time of Justinian (probably in the 530s CE) reflect the actual application of laws controlling associations in earlier years.

Furthermore, even the documents which have been preserved are somewhat ambiguous concerning Roman policy on associations. In some respects, they hint at the need for a considerable degree of control and in others they reflect greater freedom of association. The much-cited passage attributed to the Roman jurist Marcianus (who was active ca. 222–235 CE), states the following:

By the decrees of the emperors, the governors of the provinces have orders not to allow associations (*collegia sodalicia*), not even soldiers’ associations. But the poor (*tenuiorum*) are permitted to contribute a monthly donation to a common fund, and are allowed to assemble only once a month, but not as a pretext to convene an unlawful association (*illicitum collegium*), which the divine Severus [193–211 CE] said in a rescript should not be tolerated, not only at Rome, but also in Italy and the provinces. (1) But it is not forbidden to assemble

for religious purposes (*religio*) if one does not act against the decree of the Senate which forbade unlawful associations (*Digest* 47.22.1 = *AGRW* L53).

Following the theory espoused by Theodor Mommsen (1843), scholars sometimes cite this passage as proof that there was a law controlling associations in Italy and the provinces, assuming that this reference to a source of the third century is indicative of the existence and enforcement of laws in earlier years, even as early as the time of Augustus.

In particular, Mommsen argued that this law was rooted in what he labelled the *lex Iulia de collegiis* (the supposed association-component of the Julian law), a hypothesized part of Augustan legislation still held as a working hypothesis by some scholars today (Suetonius, *Aug.* 32, was taken as an allusion to this law).<sup>19</sup> This hypothesized Julian law, in this view, required that an association needed the permission of the senate in order to be considered a legal association (*collegia licita*) and that those without such permission would be considered illegal (*illicita*). Mommsen, Waltzing and others suggested that some exceptions were made, including that associations of the poor (*tenuiorum*) aimed at offering burial for their members were not subject to the law. I have already dealt with the problems surrounding the *collegia funeraticia* category that these scholars used in the discussion of typologies.

It is problematic to interpret this passage from the *Digest* in such a general manner. The time of Septimius Severus (193–211 CE) and after, not the first or early-second centuries, was, in many respects, a turning point in state control of associations, and this is the primary context for understanding Marcianus' collected material here. The development of the so-called compulsory membership in the occupational guilds, for instance, began following the time of Septimius Severus.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, scholars who discuss this passage often neglect the final sentence in the quotation above:<sup>21</sup> "But it is not forbidden to assemble for religious purposes if one does not act against the decree of the Senate which forbade unlawful associations." It is not clear which decree is being referred to here, though it may be related to senatorial decrees which are cited in inscriptions from Italy.<sup>22</sup> For instance, a group devoted to Diana and Antinoos at Lanuvium (a town that was located about 32 km southeast of Rome) quotes a decree (which is only partially preserved here) as follows:

Clause from the decree of the Senate of the Roman People: "These are permitted to assemble,

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19 For a full discussion of Mommsen's theory, see Bendlin 2011, 223–228. Despite Bendlin's valuable analysis of the weaknesses in Mommsen's theory, Bendlin still holds to the likely existence of the otherwise unattested Augustan *lex Iulia de collegiis* (Bendlin 2011, 242–243). In my opinion, Bendlin too readily dismisses the option that many aspects of the laws outlined by Marcianus (and the procedures that flowed from them) may relate primarily to the time of Septimius Severus (193–211 CE) (Bendlin 2011, 244–245). Without clear evidence, I find it problematic to propose that these were a continuation of earlier laws or legal procedures going as far back as the supposed *lex Iulia* of Augustus.

20 See Kornemann 1901, 442–80; Radin 1910, 134–35.

21 This is particularly a problem in Cotter 1996, 86–87.

22 As Bendlin (2011, 246) explains, the senatorial permission formulae are primarily attested in Italy: in Rome (five cases), Ostia (six cases), Portus (one case), Casinum (one case), Cumae (two cases), Minturnae (one case), Puteoli (three cases) and Telesia (one case). The provincial examples involve Roman communities in Gaul, Alpes Maritimae, and Baetica (two cases), and in Lugdunum (two cases). The Kyzikos inscription may be added to this list for Asia, depending on how one interprets it.

convene, and have an association (*collegium*): those who desire to make monthly contributions . . . may assemble in such an association, but. . . not . . . in the name of such an association except once a month for the sake of . . ., to provide burial for them when they die” (*CIL XIV 2112* = *AGRW* 310, lines 10–15; ca. 136 CE).<sup>23</sup>

Even this association at Lanuvium clearly does not feel a need to follow the decree’s prescriptions strictly: the group meets more often than once a month and for purposes other than just burial or honoring deities. Bendlin (2011, 240) suggests that the senatorial restriction only applied to a monthly “business meeting” (*conventus*) and that, by holding other types of meetings, the Lanuvium association was not, therefore, abrogating the decree it cites. This is indeed possible, but here and elsewhere in his article on the Lanuvium inscription specifically, Bendlin *assumes* a far closer alignment between Roman legal theory and social realities than I would be willing to adopt.

More importantly, the passage from the *Digest* suggests that the Roman policy towards associations engaged in honoring the gods (*religio*) was relatively indifferent; they, too, alongside those organized for burial, were permitted to exist (though the Lanuvium inscription itself does not directly appeal to such a policy regarding *religio*). It should be noted, however, that the imperial elite’s concept of *religio* was a very restrictive one. Just about any activity that veered from narrowly defined elite concepts of honoring the Roman gods “properly” could easily be viewed as “superstition” (*superstitio*), rather than *religio*. So this phrase preserved by the third century legal compiler may have entailed less freedom than first appears.

When assessing laws concerning the control of associations, it is important to note that other passages in the *Digest* indicate some degree of freedom of association, suggesting that Roman policy tolerated the existence of such groups without interfering in their lives in many respects. One document is attributed to Gaius (ca. 130–180 CE), for instance, who cites what he claims was a Greek law of Solon (sixth century BCE) as a precedent, assuming that associations exist and are permitted to form contracts together:

This law appears to have been taken over from a law of Solon, which is as follows [in Greek]: “If the people (*dēmos*), or brothers (*fratres*), or those engaging in sacred rites (*orgia*), or sailors (*nautai*), or messmates (*syssitōi*), or those who are buried in the same tomb (*homotaphoi*), or members of a society (*thiasōtai*) who generally live together, enter into any contract with one another, whatever they agree upon is binding, unless the public laws forbid it (*Digest* 47.22.4 = *AGRW* L 44).

Whether or not the decrees or precedents for imperial action which did exist, such as those in the *Digest* or those reported in literary sources for the times of Augustus, Nero, and others, were actually remembered from one period to the next or employed in a consistent manner as an ongoing legal “policy” is another question altogether. I would not agree with Bendlin’s (2011, 246) suggestion that my view regarding the limited degree of imperial policy and intervention (expressed in the first edition of this work) is a “conceptual misunderstanding” of the Roman imperial interest in controlling associations. The scholarly disagreement is more about what *assumptions* scholars are willing to adopt in cases where evidence is lacking, in my view. I should state that my view in that

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23 For an extensive new study of the Lanuvium inscription, see Bendlin 2011 (although I do not concur with certain aspects of his arguments concerning *collegia* and the law).



edition (and this) is that Roman authorities did have an active interest in the potential problem of people gathering together. Specific authorities acted accordingly on occasion and sometimes these precedents could effect subsequent, occasional imperial actions. The varied responses of specific Roman authorities to particular associations, both *positive* and *negative*, was one of my main points in the earlier discussion of incidents in the republican period, and this complicated scenario likely continues to hold for the imperial era. I am not able to adopt the view of Bendlin and others before him regarding the supposed existence of ongoing, well-developed Roman legal frameworks or policies (regarding the need for permission for associations to exist or for the dissolution of associations that were considered illegal) which continued from one principate to the next (let alone from the time of Augustus on). Although the *assumption* that a Julian law on *collegia* existed and continued to develop in a consistent way (as a core of Roman legal theory) does have a long scholarly tradition behind it, I do not share it.

Even if authorities did have consistent policies from one period to the next about controlling associations, which I doubt and consider unsubstantiated, there were significant limitations on a Roman official's ability to practically implement any ideas he did have about controlling associations in a given province. It is noteworthy that on this latter point (regarding the limitations of actual intervention) Bendlin and I are in agreement.<sup>24</sup> For present purposes, a discussion of Asia Minor will clarify the limited nature of imperial authorities' intervention in associations of the provinces specifically.

### **Disturbances in the Provinces of Asia Minor**

Intervention of officials in the associative life of the provinces was occasional, pertaining to the particularities of time and place and falling far short of comprehensive control.<sup>25</sup> There was a significant gap between potential imperial legal ideologies or policies with respect to associations (whatever degree of development we *assume* for such ideologies or policies in light of the lack of evidence) and the remembrance, implementation, or enforcement of the precedents or laws that may have existed.<sup>26</sup> When it comes to the province of Asia itself, there is virtually no evidence for Roman officials dissolving such groups and, depending on how one handles the case of the organization of young men (*neoi*) at Kyzikos, no signs of legal requirements or senatorial approval for permission to exist as an association.<sup>27</sup> Since the publication of the first edition of the present work, Ilias Arnaoutoglou's (2002, 2005) studies similarly concurs that there was a lack of imperial intervention to control associations in Asia Minor and in Egypt. Instead of consistent intervention to control associations, we have civic disturbances which illustrate quite well the sporadic nature of Roman officials' interventions in the lives of associations in the provinces of Asia Minor.

The Acts account of a disturbance (*tarachos*) at Ephesos attempts to present a realistic picture of

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24 This agreement is evident in Bendlin's 2011 article in some respects. Bendlin confirmed the agreement regarding questions of implementation when he read this manuscript.

25 Cf. Philo, *Against Flaccus* 4–5 = *AGRW* L36, concerning Egypt.

26 Bendlin (2011, 242) and I seem to agree on this point regarding the significant gap which may have existed between imperial ideology regarding the control of associations and the actual intervention of authorities in real cases.

what sort of unrests could occur and how the authorities might come to be involved (Acts 19:23–41).<sup>28</sup> Apparently in response to Paul’s preaching that gods made with hands were not gods at all, the prominent guild of silversmiths gathered together a crowd of craftsmen and others in defence of the city’s patron deity, chanting “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” for hours in the theater (→ [silversmiths at Ephesos](#)). As with the involvement of associations in the disturbance at Pompeii under Nero, it is civic pride (in this case defence of the city’s patron deity) which played a key role in instigating the incident.

According to the account, this incident did not invoke Roman intervention. Instead it was settled by civic authorities, in this case the secretary (*grammateus*; an important position). The secretary’s speech to the crowd does warn of the potential involvement of Roman officials if the usual institutional procedures were not pursued to resolve disputes:

If . . . Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against any one, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls; let them bring charges against one another. But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly (*ekklēsia*). For we are in danger of being charged with rioting (*stasis*) today, there being no cause that we can give to justify this commotion (Acts 19:38–40 [RSV]).

It was only when a disturbance reached such riotous levels and, even then, only when local civic mechanisms failed to solve the problem, that there was *potential* for a Roman proconsul to intervene, provided that he was not busy elsewhere on the judicial circuit.

There was another occasion at Ephesos when the proconsul actually did personally intervene in the form of an edict. This is the case of disturbances (*staseis*) involving the bakers in the second century ([IEph 215](#)). Unlike the incident with the silversmiths, in this case the civic functionaries at Ephesos had been unable to resolve the unrest caused by the bakers in the market-place, who were not producing the necessary bread for reasons we do not know (which should caution us against calling this a “strike,” as Buckler does).<sup>29</sup> As a result, control of the situation was turned over to the proconsul, apparently on the initiative of the civic Council (as the inclusion of a now fragmentary civic decree also suggests). He responded with an edict attempting to put an end to the “disorder and tumults” (*tarachēn kai thorybous*) caused by the bakers in such a way, he stressed, that the welfare of the city was put first and the essential production of food continued. The bakers were not punished, nor dissolved as a guild, but instead warned not to continue such factious meetings or disturbances (with the threat of future punishment). The issue as to whether associations were permitted to exist does not appear at all in the proconsul’s edict. Nor does the document refer to any precedents which would suggest that such disturbances were a consistent problem in Asia or that laws controlling associations as such were regularly enforced by Roman officials there.

27 Contrary to a tradition in scholarship which sees the Kyzikos inscription as an instance of a law that required imperial permission for an association to be formed (cf. Waltzing 1895–1900, 1.123–27, who cites Mommsen; cf. Bendlin 2011, 240–241), the senate’s reply to the request of Kyzikos concerning recognition of the group (*corpus*) of young men (*neoi*) there (*CIL* III 7060; 138 or 139 CE; cf. *GCRE* 57–60) can be understood as “honorific, not constitutory” (Radin 1910, 125; Forbes 1933, 40–41). That is, without being required to do so, associations or other groups could seek the recognition of some institution or authority for the prestige and honor the display of such would attribute to them.

28 On the significance of this passage, see, for instance, Stoops 1989, 73–91; Molthagen 1991, 42–76.

29 See the full discussion in Buckler 1923.



Figure 45: Bust of Trajan, now in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen.

Of the incidents concerning associations in other provinces of Asia Minor, the most well-known are those involving Pliny as legate or governor of the province of Bithynia and Pontus as appointed by the emperor Trajan (ca. 110–11 CE; see the bust of Trajan in figure 45). Pliny refers to associations at a few points in his letters. First, I opened the previous chapter with Trajan’s reply to Pliny regarding the formation of an association of firemen at Nikomedia in Bithynia (*Epistles* 10.33–34 = *AGRW* L40). Second, Pliny refers to the free city of Amisos’ petition to form “benefit-societies” (*eranos*). In this case Trajan’s response acknowledges Amisos’ status of freedom which allowed them to do what was forbidden in other cities, provided that the groups were “not used for riotous and unlawful assemblies, but to relieve cases of hardship among the poor (*tenuiorum*)” (10.93–94). Finally, when Christians were brought before Pliny in Pontus (perhaps at Amisos or Amastris), he told Trajan that these groups had obeyed Pliny’s earlier edict pertaining to societies (*hetaeriae*; 10.96). Several scholars suggest that this edict encompassed some sort of restrictions on association (though we do not know any details), restrictions which coincided with mandates given to him by Trajan. It is possible that the focus of the edict was the restriction of night-time meetings.

Contrary to a common assumption in scholarship, the evidence from Pliny falls short of consistently enforced “imperial policies” regarding associations in the provinces generally. There are

at least two things that we need to remember when reading about these incidents involving associations in Bithynia-Pontus. Both should caution us in taking Pliny's case as normative for other provinces or times, or as necessarily reflective of the actual reality of associative life even in this province.

First, the situation in Bithynia and Pontus around the beginning of the second century was exceptional in some respects. Trajan appointed Pliny as legate with consular power, giving him a "special mission" aimed at rectifying previous maladministration of the province, local political factionalism, and financial mismanagement of the cities (*Epistles* 10.18, 32).<sup>30</sup> We know that Roman proconsuls preceding this period had been accused of maladministration (Julius Bassus, proconsul ca. 101 CE, and Varenus Rufus, ca. 105 CE). Furthermore, inter-city rivalry and internal political factionalism was seen to be exceptionally bad at the time in the region. Dio of Prusa (late-first century CE) refers to problems relating to parties supporting one aristocrat over against others, noting that there were times when politically-motivated gatherings (*hetaireiai*) played a role in these partisan politics within the cities (*Orations* 45.8, 10 = *AGRW* L12). Most importantly, despite general prosperity at the time, the financial management of the cities was perceived to be in utter disarray, which directly affected many building projects. There was a "need for many reforms," as Trajan states, and he wanted Pliny to take exceptional measures in order to correct the situation (cf. *Epistles* 10.18, 32). In this specific case, a specially appointed legate's (Pliny's) intervention in aspects of life in the cities, associations among them, might understandably exceed the norm.

Within this broader picture of a special mission to correct regional problems, we can better understand why it is that Trajan's instructions to Pliny include, among other things, a caution against the contribution associations could make towards factionalism. This situation-specific nature of Trajan's advice to Pliny comes out clearly even in the case of the fire at Nikomedia. Trajan mentions that it is the specific problems in the cities of the province at the time which necessitate Pliny's disallowing what may have been done elsewhere (at least in the West), although we lack much evidence for it: namely, arranging for a guild of craftsmen (*collegium fabrorum*) to serve as a voluntary fire-brigade.<sup>31</sup> Despite Trajan's concerns, however, there are even exceptions to this general tendency to disallow associations. As previously mentioned, a city with free status, such as Amisos, was to do as it pleased so long as no major disorders or political problems resulted. Concern to control associations would not be as prominent in other provinces at the time or even in the same province at times when the Roman authorities' perception of disorder and mismanagement was not as prevalent. It is also important to remember that the emperor's or governor's wishes, even at these exceptional times, were not necessarily consonant with the day to day lived reality in many cities and towns.

The second thing to remember when considering the potential control of associations, then, relates to broader issues concerning the nature of Roman rule. There was a gap between the wishes of an emperor and the theoretical power of a governor, on the one hand, and the reality of life in hundreds of cities, on the other. However powerful a governor such as Pliny was in theory and however much Trajan might wish to correct specific problems in a particular area, there were

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30 Cf. Magie 1950, 593-605; C. P. Jones 1978

31 On the potential role of *collegia* in fire-fighting and the lack of evidence for this, see Liu 2009, esp. pp. 126-129 and Perry 2006.

“severe constraints on the effective exercise of their responsibilities by provincial governors and other elite officials” (Burton 1993, 25). As Keith Hopkins (1980, 121) plausibly estimates, in the second century there would have been approximately one Roman equestrian or senatorial administrator for every 350,000–400,000 inhabitants. Added to this is the vast territory overseen by a sole Roman governor along with his small staff of procurators, legates, or others. In Asia, for example, there were at least 300 constituent civic communities under a governor’s jurisdiction, and a similar though lesser number would have existed in Bithynia and Pontus. Finally, duties relating to the collection of taxes, the administration of justice (the assize-circuit), and the overall maintenance of public order would more than occupy the governor and his assistants, leaving little room for ongoing enforcement of laws or strict control over all the cities and their populations. By virtue of the nature of Roman rule, states G. P. Burton (1975, 105), control “could only be sporadic and discontinuous, and variable from district to district.” This also applies, by extension, to the control of unofficial, local associations.

Furthermore, it is important to note that we are seeing things through the eyes of Pliny, who is concerned to give the impression of success, suggesting that he is thoroughly controlling the situations in the cities of the province as per Trajan’s request. One wonders, for instance, whether Pliny projects onto the Christians a clear awareness and strict obedience to his earlier edict (whatever it contained) in order to impress upon Trajan the effectiveness of Pliny’s actions in gaining the obedience of provincials. As a result, we hear most about situations in which Pliny is “reforming” successfully in the province rather than situations he is unaware of or unable to address.

In light of all this, it is likely that the average guild of coppersmiths or association of Dionysiac devotees in Bithynia or Pontus, as elsewhere in the provinces, could go on meeting together relatively unnoticed by Roman authorities as they had before Trajan assigned Pliny to the province in about 110 CE. As P. W. Duff (1942, 130) states, “when the tradesmen and artisans of the little towns met to dine and honor their patrons, human and divine, they did not worry much about spies who might carry tales to the authorities.” Though the partial nature of our epigraphic evidence from Bithynia and Pontus certainly does not provide us with a complete picture, there were associations of various kinds, both before and after Pliny, meeting in numerous cities including Amastris, Apameia, Kios, Nikaia, Nikomedia, and Prusa (→ [Bithynia](#), → [Pontus](#)).<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

Although intervention by Roman officials could occur on occasion within the broader context of civic disturbances, these incidents were not broadly representative of ongoing external relations between associations and the civic or imperial elites. In general, associations were not anti-Roman or subversive groups, let alone sects in tension with society generally. For some associations we simply do not have sufficient evidence to discern whether, or to what extent, there was involvement in imperial facets of social networks, so we must be cautious in assuming that all associations were

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32 Bithynia happens to be better represented in the evidence. Cf. *IBithMendel* II 184 (shippers at Amastris); *IApamBith* 33–35 (*thiasitai*), 103 (initiates), 116; *IKios* 20–22 (*thiasitai*); *INikaia* II.1 73\* (coppersmiths); *TAM* IV 22, 33 (shippers at Nikomedia); *IBithMendel* I 3 (initiates at Prusa); *IPrusaOlymp* 48, 1028 (initiates), 1036 (sack-weavers). All date to the first or second century. There was a synagogue of Judeans at Nikomedia as well (*TAM* IV 376–77).

involved in precisely the same way or to the same degree. Rather, it seems that there was a range of possibilities regarding participation within these areas of civic life. Archaeological evidence for cultic honors and imperial connections among many associations in Roman Asia Minor strongly suggests relative integration in society for certain groups. I now turn to the task of comparing these associations with synagogues and congregations in order to begin to locate the place of Judeans and Christ-devotees within Greco-Roman society.







PART 3:  
SYNAGOGUES AND CONGREGATIONS WITHIN SOCIETY



## 7 / COMPARING GROUPS IN ANTIQUITY

### Introduction

Scholars with a sociohistorical interest in Judean synagogues and Christian congregations within the Greco-Roman world have increasingly recognized the value in studying other groups, associations or guilds. Wayne A. Meeks, for example, is among those who acknowledge similarities between Judean and Christian groups on the one hand and associations on the other. He draws attention to the fact that both were small, voluntary groups which gathered together for communal meals and rituals on a regular basis (Meeks 1983, 35, 77-78). To an outsider, a Judean or Christian group could initially appear to be another association, *koinon*, *thiasos*, *synodos* or *collegium*.

Yet for Meeks and others, although there are similarities between such groups at first glance, there are fundamental differences which make associations less than satisfactory analogies for comparison, particularly regarding group-society relations. Most importantly here, from this perspective groups of Judeans and of Jesus-followers were utterly exclusive of other loyalties and they were “sects” in a sociological sense of the word, whereas most associations were not. Scholars who focus on the Apocalypse, 1 Peter or other literature pertinent to Asia Minor also characterize these congregations of Christ-devotees in general as largely sectarian. In other words, scholars like John H. Elliott (1990 [1981]), Harry O. Maier (1991), and Margaret Y. MacDonald (1988) stress congregations’ separation from most, if not all, facets of society and such scholars emphasize conflicts in group-society interactions. This picture of a largely uniform set of exclusive and sectarian groups serves to obscure rather than explain other evidence which suggests more complicated scenarios regarding the relationship between particular groups and surrounding society.

Some recent studies of the Judean diaspora are beginning to draw a more complicated picture of how synagogues fit within the Greek city (*polis*) in areas such as Roman Asia. Moreover, the artefactual evidence concerning synagogues which I discuss sheds light on areas of participation in civic life, such that a sectarian reading of these Judean groups is inadequate. Likewise, primary evidence for *some* assemblies of Jesus-followers, including those reflected in 1 Peter, the Pastoral epistles, and Ignatius’ epistles, points in a similar direction regarding areas of positive interaction. Insights from the social sciences concerning complex processes of acculturation and assimilation among cultural minority groups, rather than sectarianism, may suggest more fruitful approaches to such issues of group-society relations. Moreover, there is a growing recognition among some scholars that social groupings in the ancient world, especially associations (more so than modern “sects”), can serve as helpful comparative analogies and sociological models for understanding dynamics of group-society interactions. The present chapter sets the stage for a more extensive comparative study of evidence regarding Judean and Christian participation in imperial aspects of civic life. Mounting evidence makes a sectarian reading of many synagogues and assemblies implausible.

## Associations and Early Christianity: Trajectories in Scholarship<sup>1</sup>

Though scholars since Theodor Mommsen (1843) noted the importance of associations for understanding legal issues concerning early Christianity, it was the work of both Georg Heinrici and Edwin Hatch around the end of the nineteenth century that laid the foundation—upon which no structure was built for almost a century—for the comparison of Christian groups and associations (see Kloppenborg 1993a). Heinrici, who focused on issues of the internal organization of Pauline communities, proposed that associations (more so than synagogues) should be considered as “historical analogies” to Christian congregations (Heinrici 1881, 509).<sup>2</sup> Apparently unaware of Heinrici’s work, Hatch (1909 [1880]) made a similar proposition regarding the comparability of organizational structures. What interests me far more here are some of Hatch’s methodological concerns and their implications for sociohistorical approaches and comparison.

Hatch is emphatic about the need for scholars to approach the study of early Christianity not with apologetic notions regarding its uniqueness and, hence, incomparability, but rather with the same set of historical methods that one would employ in studying any phenomena within that same society: “the facts of ecclesiastical history do not differ in kind from the facts of civic history” (Hatch 1909 [1880], 2, 13–20). Hatch emphasizes the need to approach the early Christian assemblies “as organizations in the midst of human society,” paying close attention to the “relations of the early Churches to the social strain in the midst of which they grew” (pp. 32, 54).

A corollary of this approach is a concern to employ comparative methods in the study of social structures and organizations in the Greco-Roman world, and Hatch gives special attention to comparing associations and congregations in regard to leadership structures. However, both Hatch and Heinrici faced harsh criticisms from other scholars (often with apologetic overtones), the majority of whom emphasized Christianity’s insulation from Greco-Roman influence and stressed the synagogue instead as the formative influence with regard to the organization of congregations.<sup>3</sup> Quite often, it seems, critics of comparison (and *sometimes* even Heinrici and Hatch) had in mind questions of influence or *borrowing*, of genealogy, rather than analogy. The comparative program implied by the works of Heinrici and Hatch gained little or no attention or elaboration within

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1 Three main themes have dominated discussion of Christianity and Judaism with respect to associations: the relation (or lack thereof) of ideas associated with the mysteries to concepts and practices within Christianity (Reitzenstein 1978 [1910], 76–81; see Smith 1990 for the history of scholarship); the internal organization of the group (see the discussion of Heinrici and Hatch below); and the relevance of imperial policy and laws concerning *collegia* for understanding the legal position of Christian or Judean groups (Ramsay 1901; Hardy 1910 [1906], 128–49; La Piana 1927; Guterman 1951, 130–56; Reicke 1951).

2 Also see Heinrici 1876, 1877. Cf. Wilson 1927, 120–35.

3 Cf. Malherbe 1983 [1977], 86–91; Kloppenborg 1993. C. Holsten accuses Heinrici of suggesting that Paul actually “used the life-forms of a cult-association of demons (1 Cor 10:20)” (“die Lebensformen einer Kultgenossenschaft der Dämonen [1 Kor. 10,20] benutze” [see Heinrici 1881, 507]). In 1889, Adolf Harnack (1889, 419) claimed that the investigation of the organization of pagan associations had brought very little or no clarification (“dass die Berücksichtigung der Organisation der heidnischen Genossenschaften nur geringe oder gar keine Aufklärung gebracht hat”). A few years later W. M. Ramsay (1901, 98) acknowledged the importance of *collegia* but was careful to state that “no reconciliation was possible at that time between Christian principles and present social forms. . . . But . . . I must also confess that a strong inclination attracts me to the side of those who were trying . . . to combine Christian spirit with the existing institutions of society and civilization.”

scholarship in the decades that followed.

Hatch's focus on understanding congregations in relation to social groups and structures of surrounding society is, in some respects, a precursor to Edwin A. Judge's work on *The Social Pattern of the Christian Groups in the First Century* (1960). Judge's sociohistorical approach and attention to associations, unfortunately, also went largely unacknowledged for some time. What interests us most here are Judge's observations regarding the relation of congregations and synagogues to the social structures and institutions of society, including the Greek city (*polis*), the household (*oikos*), and the association (*koinōnia*). Judge emphasizes that congregations did not live in a vacuum, isolated from the rest of society; rather, the Christian group "belongs inevitably, as a social phenomenon, to the Hellenistic republics [i.e. *poleis*]. Its thinking and behaviour naturally reflect the social institutions of these states" (p. 14). Judge suggests that associations provide an analogy to both congregations and synagogues, despite peculiarities and variations among these groups. In fact, he writes, "they were not distinguished in the public's mind from the general run of unofficial associations," nor would they be "unwilling to be thought of as forming an association of the usual kind" (pp. 44, 45). The implications of Judge's preliminary observations with regard to the fruitfulness of comparison are echoed several years later when Abraham Malherbe (1983 [1977], 89) optimistically states: if "we are interested in social relations . . . and in analogies rather than genealogical relationships, the material [regarding associations] may help to clarify some aspects of both the informal relationships within the church as well as the *church's relationship to the larger society*" (emphasis added).

Numerous useful studies have emerged in the following decades that have pursued comparison of associations with congregations or synagogues to some degree. Often the focus has been primarily on internal life or organization rather than group-society relations, as is evident in the works listed in the note.<sup>4</sup> Even though valuable studies have taken things further since the preparation of the first edition of the present work, many sociohistorical issues remain under-explored.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, attention to a few well-known inscriptions (e.g. the monuments of the Iobacchoi at Athens and the Diana-devotees at Lanuvium) sometimes substitutes for careful, regional analysis of the wide-ranging epigraphic and archeological material that is available. Building on the insight that both congregations and synagogues might be viewed as associations, my next chapter pursues a comparative study of just one dimension of group-society interaction. It explores in detail how the evidence for associations' participation in imperial honors and

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4 Studies of early Christianity that make substantial reference to associations or guilds focus on topics such as: the social context of missionary activity (Hock 1980); the organization, hierarchy and leadership structures of Christian groups (Countryman 1977; Barton and Horsley 1981; Maier 1991; Schmeller 1995; Kloppenborg 1996b); the influence of household structures on organization and internal life (Klauck 1981; White 1997; Maier 1991, 15-28); the architecture of buildings or meeting-places (White 1997); internal activities, especially communal meals (Smith 1980; Barton and Horsley 1981; Klauck 1982, 40-165; Eckhardt 2009); outsiders' perceptions and the self-understanding of Christian groups (Wilken 1972, 1984); the linguistic field of the New Testament (Danker 1982; Ascough 1996); and, specific New Testament passages or documents including Paul's Corinthian, Thessalonian and Philippian correspondence (Kloppenborg 1993b; Ascough 2000). Similar studies with respect to Judean groups include those on: internal regulations and organization (Dombrowski 1966; Weinfeld 1986); the financial management of synagogues (Bonz 1993); and the architecture of synagogue buildings (White 1997; Richardson 1996). Also see the studies by various scholars in Kloppenborg and Wilson, eds. 1996.

connections sheds light on the activities of both Judean synagogues and Christian congregations in Roman Asia in a way that makes a sectarian reading of many groups problematic. Part of the reason for a dearth in comparative studies regarding group-society relations specifically pertains to another trajectory within scholarship that needs to be dealt with here.

Meeks and other scholars contend that, overall, associations do *not* serve as very useful models for comparison with Christian groups.<sup>6</sup> This contention rests on several supposed key *differences* between associations and these groups which, in the view of these scholars, outweigh any similarities which would warrant deeper analysis or more extensive comparison:

- (1) Christian groups were far more inclusive or heterogeneous in terms of social composition, while associations were more homogeneous;
- (2) Christian groups did not use the same terminology for the group or its organization and leadership structures;
- (3) associations were a “self-contained local phenomenon,” lacking the sort of extra-local linkages which the churches possessed; and, most importantly here,
- (4) Christian groups, like Judean ones, were fundamentally exclusivistic or sectarian while associations were not.<sup>7</sup>

This tendency to assert the *incomparability* of associations and Christianity also extends to some scholars of Greco-Roman religion.<sup>8</sup> Walter Burkert (1987, 2–4) correctly refutes some common stereotypes concerning the mysteries. Yet he also devotes considerable attention to dismissing any possibility that societies (*thiasoi*) or associations of initiates in the mysteries (*mystai*) were in any sense “communities” with ongoing “identities”: “festive togetherness . . . does not outlast the festival” (pp. 43, 43–53, 110). The measuring stick, it becomes increasingly clear, is an *idealized* picture of early Christian “churches” as *true* communities; over against this caricature, other groups are considered inferior and lacking in a sense of belonging for their members. This becomes the basis for Burkert’s problematic theory regarding why the mysteries were to “pass away” and Christianity was to succeed (pp. 45, 48–53).

Before fully addressing the issue of sectarianism (point 4), it is important to note some problems with Meeks’ approach to the first three points. The main methodological problem is that in assessing the usefulness of comparison Meeks adopts a uniform picture of congregations (based

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5 Book-length comparative studies that have appeared since 2000 include: Runesson 2001 (on the origins of the Judean synagogue); Egelhaaf-Gaiser and Schäfer, eds. 2002; Ascough 2003 (dealing with Macedonia); Ebel 2004 (dealing with 1 Corinthians); Harland 2009 (on identity); Alikin 2010 (gatherings and activities); Öhler 2011 (Acts and the associations); and, Gillihan 2012 (building on Weinfeld 1986 regarding the Dead Sea community). While Ascough’s research reflects a wide-ranging knowledge of epigraphy for the region of Macedonia, Ebel and Gillihan continue to rely heavily on a few, well-known inscriptions. An ongoing seminar on Greco-Roman Meals in the Society of Biblical Literature continues to include investigation of associations while building on the work of Dennis Smith (2003), Matthias Klinghardt (1996) and Hal Taussig (2009). See, most recently, Smith and Taussig 2012.

6 Cf. Richard A. Horsley 2005, who asserts that theories that draw on evidence concerning associations are invalid since Paul was heading up “an international anti-imperial movement” (p. 394). I return to R. A. Horsley’s problematic methods and anti-imperial theories further on in chapters eight and nine.

7 Meeks 1983, 78–80; cf. Schmeller 1995.

8 Cf. Lane Fox 1986, 85–89, 324–25.



primarily on social data from Corinth) which is contrasted to an artificially uniform picture of associations (based on something other than an extensive knowledge of the varied primary evidence for these groups). Yet these pictures do not actually reflect the more complex and diverse realities concerning both Christian assemblies and other associations. Furthermore, Meeks' understanding of each of the supposed fundamental differences is questionable, particularly since the evidence for associations—which is varied and deserving of study on its own terms—has not received the kind of attention which early Christian sources have. A few scholars familiar with inscriptions regarding associations, including John S. Kloppenborg and Richard S. Ascough, have begun to challenge or qualify central aspects of each of Meeks' main points.<sup>9</sup>

First of all, Meeks oversimplifies issues concerning the social composition of associations in antiquity. The evidence for the makeup of associations and guilds, like that for congregations, is in fact varied. Both types of groups could draw their membership from similar social network connections and could range from being relatively homogeneous (e.g. many occupational associations and the hand-workers devoted to Christ at Thessalonica) to more heterogeneous or socially inclusive (e.g. the association of fishermen at Ephesos, many household or cultic-based associations, and the Christ-groups at Corinth).

Second, congregations and synagogues shared in common with associations many organizational characteristics. Each could be heavily influenced by the structures of the household and by the common conventions of benefaction and honors in the Greek East, conventions which often meant that wealthier benefactors naturally became leaders of the group.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, as Kloppenborg (1993a, 232) also points out regarding the specifics of leadership positions, there “is no a priori reason to assume that there was uniformity among the Pauline churches, any more than one should assume a uniform organizational structure in associations. On the contrary, titles were highly variable, local particularities abound, and in many instances we have no indication of how officers were designated.” Contrary to what Meeks implies, there are in fact considerable cross-overs in the varied terminology employed by different guilds, associations, and both synagogues and congregations. I explore shared terminology and self-designations at some length in a recent study of identity (see Harland 2009, 25–59). So, for example, self-designations used by Judean groups in Asia Minor were also used by other associations, including “synagogue” (*synagōgē*), “household” (*oikos*), “settlement” (*katoikountes*), “synod” (*synodos*), and “associates” (*hetairoi*). There were at least some associations that, like Pauline congregations, drew on civic terminology to refer to the group or its meetings, including use of the term “assembly” (*ekklēsia*) for a gathering (e.g. *IDelos* 1519 = *AGRW* 223, lines 1–2). However, so far there is a lack of clear evidence for an association using “assembly” (*ekklēsia*) as an ongoing self-designation or title for the group itself. Despite the variety in leadership structures among both associations and Christian congregations, there are also cross-overs in titles such as “overseer” (*episkopos*), “elders” (*presbyteroi*), “servant”/ “deacon” (*diakonos*) and “patroness” (*prostatis*).<sup>11</sup> Both types of groups could use familial language in reference to leaders or

9 Cf. Kloppenborg 1993a; Ascough 1997, 2003, 2006. See an extended discussion in Harland 2009, esp. pp. 63–81 (regarding brother-language).

10 Cf. Klauck 1981; White 1996; Maier 1991; Rajak and Noy 1993.

11 See Kloppenborg 1993, 231–34; Ascough 2003, 79–83. For a group with overseers, see *IG* XII,3 329 + *IG* XII,3 Suppl. 1295 on p. 284 (from Thera island). On the use of *presbyteros* in connection with associations see, for

benefactors, as well as fellow-members (on which see Harland 2009, 63–81).

Third, as Richard S. Ascough's (1997a) study clearly shows, Meeks exaggerates the extra-local character of Christian assemblies and underestimates the possibilities for these linkages among associations. We have already encountered such linkages in connection with ethnic and other associations. Yet the difficulties with Meeks' approach to the question of comparing Christian groups with other models in the environment is not limited to these few substantive points.

## The Portrayal of Christian and Judean Groups as "Sects"

### 1. *Exclusivity and Sectarianism*

Most pertinent to the issue of group-society relations is Meeks' claim that, like synagogues, "Christian groups were exclusive and totalistic in a way that no club nor even any pagan cultic association was" (point four above). While he admits that "the boundaries of the Pauline groups were somewhat more open than those of some other early Christian circles" (i.e. "gates" in community boundaries), he nonetheless stresses that all Pauline groups involved a "thoroughgoing resocialization, in which the *sect* was intended to become virtually the primary group for its members, *supplanting all other loyalties*" (Meeks 1983, 35–39, 77–80, 85 [emphasis mine]).

In this respect, Meeks suggests, congregations were much like synagogues of the time, which were also fundamentally different from other associations in regard to their exclusivism and separation (Meeks cites Smallwood 1976, 123, 133–34 in this connection). He disregards considerable evidence regarding Judean groups at locations such as Sardis, Miletos, Aphrodisias, and Hierapolis where there are clearly significant contacts or relations between Judeans and non-Judeans within the civic setting. Instead, Meeks' concern is to emphasize the isolation of both Judean and Christian groups from the Greco-Roman environment, asserting their uniqueness and incomparability to other groups.

Meeks' portrait of congregations as exclusive and sectarian and associations as entirely lacking in exclusivity is problematic. Although many associations were not exclusive, some could make somewhat exclusive claims on the allegiances of their members. Such was the case with the servants (*therapeutai*) of Zeus in Sardis, who in the mid-second century re-engraved a Greek translation of an apparently ancient, Aramaic edict by the Lydian governor (ca. 404–359 BCE; Herrmann 1996, 329–335, no. 4 = *AGRW* 126). The edict instructs that the temple-keeping servants of Zeus "who enter into the shrine (*adyton*) and who crown the god not to participate in the mysteries of Sabazios with those who carry the burning incense (or: burnt offerings) and not to participate in those of Agdistis and Ma. They instruct Dorates, the temple-warden, to abstain from these mysteries." What is most significant for us here is that the leaders or certain members of this group in the Roman era felt a need to reinforce allegiance of members to the association, tending towards a view that would limit participation in other groups or mysteries. Among the statutes of the association devoted to Zeus Hypsistos ("Most High") in Philadelphia, Egypt is a prohibition against "leaving the brotherhood

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instance, *IHistria* 99, 100, 167; *IGBulg* 666; *SEG* 42 (1992), no. 1312; *OGIS* 729; *SB* 996; *IGUR* 77. On the use of *diakonos* for cultic functionaries see, for instance, *IEph* 3416–3418 (deacons alongside priests in cults for Zeus Krezimos, Hera, and Ares Tyrranos); *CCCA* I 289 (deacons among Cybele devotees at Kyzikos).

(*phratras*) of the president for another” (*PLond* VII 2193 = Roberts, Skeat, and Nock 1936, 40–42, line 14). So although exclusivity was not the norm in this “polytheistic” society, there were indeed some associations with exclusivistic tendencies.

More problematic, though, is Meeks’ assumption that most Christian groups were exclusive in a comprehensive sense. In the case of the followers of Jesus at Corinth, for instance, he categorizes relatively open boundaries including participation in legal institutions (i.e. courts), in social groupings, or in banqueting settings as exceptions rather than the rule, and even here he stresses that Christian groups in this city were “sects” nonetheless (referring to Bryan R. Wilson’s work). In the service of maintaining his focus on sectarianism, Meeks obscures the more varied nature of the evidence for Pauline and other groups. While Paul praises the Thessalonian Christians for turning from idols to God (1 Thess 1:9–10), for example, he knows and does not seem to disapprove of the practice among the Corinthians who know that “an idol has no real existence” and join with their fellow civic inhabitants at communal meals in some settings (1 Cor 8–10; see 9:19–23).<sup>12</sup> Paul warns against the dangers of idolatry (10:1–22), but he also refers to the fact that some members were invited to dinners by outsiders and that it would be acceptable in such cases to eat whatever food was put before them, as long as it did not offend others (10:27–28).

The evidence of Paul’s letter to Corinth suggests the strong possibility that some Christians were maintaining multiple affiliations or memberships within social groupings other than just the assemblies of Christ-devotees (now also see Harland 2009, 156–160). The language that Paul uses, speaking of outsiders actively inviting these Christians (*ei tis kalei hymas . . .* [10:27]), is reminiscent of the language of many actual invitations on papyri to dinners held in homes and temples, sometimes in connection with associations.<sup>13</sup> In one of these the god Sarapis himself calls on recipients of the invitation to attend: “The god invites you (*kalei se ho theos eis kleinēn*) to recline at a banquet being held in the Thoereion tomorrow from the ninth hour” (*PKöln* 57). It is quite possible that some Jesus-followers at Corinth were considered to be members in other associations, such that they would receive actual invitations to the dinners held by association-members in homes or temples. This evidence for multiple affiliations or “loyalties” (to use Meeks’ term) on the part of Christians does not fit with a sectarian understanding of such groups and should not be passed off as an exception. Later on, I will adduce further evidence of such multiple affiliations.

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12 Peter D. Gooch (1993, 1–26) discusses some building remains of banqueting facilities associated with Asklepios and Demeter at Corinth, which may be among the contexts which Paul has in mind.

13 Cf. Youtie 1948; Gilliam 1976; *NewDocs* I 1; *POxy* 110, 523, 1484, 1755, 2592, 3693, 4339.

## 2. *Sectarian Depictions of Groups Addressed by the Apocalypse*

Similar sectarian-focused depictions of Christianity are evident among scholars who focus on literature pertinent to Roman Asia. I begin by discussing scholarly approaches to the Apocalypse, dealing with some issues of persecution, before going on to 1 Peter, Ignatius, and the Pastorals.

The traditional view of the Apocalypse is that the author's references to deaths and "the blood of the saints" in the futuristic visions (e.g. Rev 6:9-11; 12:11; 14:13; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24) are in fact references to the actual, current situation faced by most members of congregations; this involved a substantial and official persecution under Domitian (emperor from 81-96 CE), who forced inhabitants to worship him as "lord and god."<sup>14</sup> Following the proponents of a Domitianic persecution,<sup>15</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the author's invective against Rome and the emperors is a "fitting response" to this sociopolitical situation. The recipients of the Apocalypse were faced with a real threat of martyrdom if they did not worship Domitian and would have identified with the Apocalypse's strongly sectarian viewpoint.<sup>16</sup> That is, most of the Christian assemblies addressed by the Apocalypse were sectarian in their relation to society in this view.

Such an understanding of the Apocalypse and, by implication, of the social situation of most congregations in Roman Asia Minor suffers from several difficulties. The problems to be discussed relate to (1) whether there was an official and substantial Domitianic persecution (along with the related issue of Domitian's character); (2) how we should characterize persecution in Asia Minor more generally; and (3) whether the Apocalypse's sectarian stance means that we can categorize most Christian groups in Asia as sects in the sense that their relationship with society and empire was primarily characterized by conflict and tension.

First, it is worth outlining the evidence often cited as support for a Domitianic persecution, particularly for Asia Minor, which was apparently first assembled by J. B. Lightfoot (1889, 104-115).<sup>17</sup> The earliest direct reference to Domitian that concerns some negative relation to Christians is the comment by Melito, bishop of Sardis (ca. 170-80 CE), preserved by Eusebius: "The only emperors who were ever persuaded by malicious men to slander our teaching were Nero and Domitian, and from them arose the lie, and the unreasonable custom of falsely accusing Christians" (*H.E.* 4.26.9; cf. *H.E.* 3.17-20; Tertullian, *Apology* 5.4, both apparently depending on Melito). Other contemporary evidence from Asia Minor does not refer to Domitian at all, and this passage does not explicitly speak of violence, although violence is assumed by those who hold the traditional view.

The futuristic visions of the Apocalypse (dated to Domitian's time by Irenaeus) make frequent references to the "blood of the saints" and the slaughter of Jesus-followers, images which John closely associates with the beasts in league with Satan, namely emperors and/or imperial officials (Rev 6:9-11; 12:11; 14:13; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 11:3-13). In the case of Christians in Pontus (ca. 110

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14 For the traditional view, see Beckwith 1967 [1919]; Charles 1920; Hemer 1986, 86-87; Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, 192-197.

15 E.g. Keresztes 1979, 257-72; Sordi 1983, 43-54.

16 Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, 6-8, 181-203; cf. deSilva 1991, 186, who uses Wilson's sect-typology.

17 See also the critique of Lightfoot's theory by Wilson 1993.

CE), Pliny the Younger states that some of the accused “said that they had ceased to be Christians two or more years previously, and some of them even twenty years ago” (*Epistles* 10.96.6 = *AGRW* L40). The figure of about twenty years coincides with the time when a Domitianic persecution would have occurred (if it did) and these, therefore, may have been apostates resulting from official persecution, according to the traditional view.

This assembled evidence from Asia Minor falls short of suggesting an official persecution by Domitian or his officials, however. Melito’s apologetic comment does not expressly refer to physical persecution at all. Rather it tries to suggest that only widely disliked emperors, Nero and Domitian, expressed negative *attitudes* towards Christian teaching (cf. Aune 1997, lxvi). As T. D. Barnes (1971, 150) points out, all “other authors who depict Domitian as a persecutor derive their information either directly or indirectly from Melito.” The visions of the Apocalypse are explicitly set in the future and do not name Domitian. We cannot assume a direct relation between futuristic rhetoric and contemporary reality, as the discussion in chapter nine clarifies. Finally, the apostates mentioned by Pliny could have been but were not necessarily the outcome of official persecution, and, in fact, this seems unlikely. Pliny’s lack of familiarity with how to approach prosecutions against Christians suggests that he, at least, did not know of an earlier, official persecution of Christians on which to base his actions. This is particularly significant in view of the fact that much of Pliny’s career during the principate of Domitian was spent at Rome. He first served as quaestor conveying messages from Domitian to the senate, then as tribune of the people, and then as praetor.<sup>18</sup> No doubt Pliny would have known of official actions taken by Domitian against Christians, either at Rome or in the provinces, if they had occurred.

Those who hold that there was a substantial Domitianic persecution also cite evidence from Rome as support. The letter of the Roman Christians to the church at Corinth, written in the 90s CE, refers to “sudden and repeated misfortunes and calamities which have befallen us (*tas aiphnidious kai epallēlous genomenas hēmin symphoras kai periptōs*),” which can be interpreted as official persecution (1 *Clement* 1.1). However, there is no explicit reference either to Domitian or to actions by Roman authorities, and this passage could refer to any number of troubles affecting the Roman Christians. Furthermore, the authors use similar language (*eris, stasis, diōgmos, polemos*) to describe the main problem at Corinth, which is not official “persecution” from outside; rather, it is the internal rebellion of youths against the elders (3.1–3). Overall, then, these bits of evidence do not add up to an official and substantial persecution by Domitian of Christians in Asia Minor.<sup>19</sup>

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18 Cf. Sherwin-White 1966, 72–82; Wilken 1984, 4–5.

19 There are two other related incidents worth mentioning that involve Domitian. First, Dio Cassius (and subsequently Eusebius) relates the episode concerning Domitian’s execution of his own nephew Flavius Clemens and the exile of Clemens’ niece, Domitilla, on charges of “atheism” (*Roman History* 67.13.1–3). Dio does not explicitly link this with Christianity, but Eusebius does (*HE*. 3.18.4). Whether Christians or Judeans, the fact remains that Clemens and Domitilla were among the senatorial elites and even members of the imperial family, which puts their case in a realm other than official persecution of ordinary Christians in the provinces. Second, Eusebius also records the “ancient story” which he derives from Hegesippus (ca. 150 CE; *HE*. 3.19–20). Domitian “gave orders for the execution of those of the family of David” and this included relatives of Christ (grandsons of Judas “who is said to have been the brother . . . of the Saviour”). These peasants from Palestine, so the story goes, were brought before Domitian and interrogated, after which he released them and “decreed an end to the persecution” (*HE*. 3.20.1–4). As Barnes also points out, various elements of the episode are less than believable and

A final related point cited by scholars of the traditional view is that a substantial persecution fits well with our overall knowledge of Domitian's *character*. Our principal sources (Pliny the Younger, Tacitus, and Suetonius) unanimously emphasize the savage and tyrannical nature of Domitian's actions, including murders of senators and pretentious demands to be honored as "lord and god" (*dominus et deus*; cf. Suetonius, *Domitian* 13.2; Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 67.4.7; 67.13.4; Pliny, *Panegyricus* 33.4; 52.6). These references to Domitian being addressed as "lord and god," for example, are often interpreted as a sign that Domitian actually promoted the imperial cult throughout the empire (including Asia Minor) in a way that differed from his predecessors.

However, recent studies of Domitian's principate suggest that the picture of a savage and mad tyrant is not accurate. Portrayals of Domitian after his death and *damnatio* by friends of a new emperor are less than accurate measures of Domitian's rule. Pat Southern (1997) and Brian W. Jones (1992) point to the unreliability of the primary sources which harshly condemn Domitian and draw a very different picture regarding his principate.<sup>20</sup> H.W. Pleket (1961, 299) argues that a strained relationship between Domitian and the senate (not his character) underlies much of the hostility expressed by upper-class authors like Pliny, Suetonius, and Tacitus. The supposed murders of innocent senators were in fact the result of trials for treason involving senators who had actively conspired against him. Furthermore, the suggestion that Domitian's supposed demands to be called "lord and god" meant that he also went out of his way to promote imperial cults in the provinces is unfounded. There is, in fact, no clear evidence of a significant change in imperial cults in Asia Minor at this time. A new provincial temple was built at Ephesos, but (as was customary) this was on the initiative of the provincial assembly, not the emperor (see Friesen 1993). The notion that imperial cult activity in a province like Asia was dependent upon active promotion by particular emperors reveals an inadequate understanding of the spontaneous nature of cultic honors for the emperors in the Greek East.

This brings me to my second point pertaining to the actual nature of persecution in Asia Minor, which is further elaborated in chapter nine. G.E.M. de Ste. Croix and Barnes show that there is a lack of evidence for any Roman-initiated, official persecution of Christians in Asia Minor and the empire generally not only in the time of Domitian but also in the first two centuries.<sup>21</sup> By and large, Nero's slaughter of Christians at Rome (as scapegoats for the fire that had devastated part of the city) was an exceptional incident, as Tacitus' (*Annals* 15.43-44) account clearly shows. Pliny's correspondence with Trajan regarding the Christians in Pontus (ca. 110 CE) and Hadrian's rescript a decade or so later (ca. 123 CE) with respect to Asia show that there were indeed occasions when some inhabitants of the cities might bring charges against Christians before Roman authorities. But nothing suggests any active persecution of Christians in the provinces by Pliny or other Roman officials or emperors before him, or any precedents to follow in the matter. The relatively passive-reactive character of Roman rule also speaks against an active or consistent role by Roman authorities in persecutions of, or prosecutions against, Christians.

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the story explicitly attempts to draw a parallel with the story of Herod and the birth of Jesus: "Domitian . . . , like Herod, was afraid of the coming of the Christ" (*HE*. 3.20.1).

20 Cf. Thompson 1990, 95-115; Suetonius, *Domitian* 8.2.

21 Ste. Croix 1963; Barnes 1968, 1971, 143-63. Cf. Thompson 1990, 95-115; A.Y. Collins 1984, 70-75; Wilson 1993, 587-605; Aune 1997, lxiv-lxix.

Persecution of Christians in the first two centuries in Asia Minor is better characterized as *local and sporadic*.<sup>22</sup> This took the form of different degrees of social harassment and verbal abuse by some civic inhabitants which could periodically lead to physical abuse or martyrdom, especially when general socioeconomic conditions were at their worst (e.g. famines, epidemics, natural disasters). In connection with the frequency of actual martyrdom, it is worth noting Origen's statement in the third century: "For a few, whose number could be easily enumerated, have died occasionally for the sake of the Christian religion by way of reminder to men that when they see a few striving for piety they may become more steadfast and may despise death" (*Against Celsus* 3.8; trans. by Chadwick 1953). The circumstances of Christians could vary from one city to the next and change over time.

There are few references in Christian literature from Asia Minor to actual Christians who were killed, which should further caution us in assuming that martyrdoms such as those envisioned (for the future) in the Apocalypse, the incident involving Pliny the Younger, or the martyrdom of Polycarp in the 160s CE were extremely common. The Apocalypse refers to Antipas as "my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you" (Rev 2:13), but we know nothing concerning the circumstances surrounding his death. Ignatius, who is himself a prisoner on his way to Rome to face death (he hopes), does not refer to any other followers of Jesus facing similar arrest or persecution, let alone martyrdom in the congregations of Asia (ca. 108–110 CE).

The evidence of 1 Peter is particularly significant concerning the nature of persecution, since it pertains to Asia Minor during roughly the same time period as the Apocalypse. 1 Peter's characterization of the situation faced by his addressees differs considerably from the martyrdoms of the Apocalypse's futuristic visions. The addressees were faced with "suffering" primarily in the form of verbal abuse: they are spoken against, blasphemed, reviled and falsely called wrongdoers (1 Peter 2:12; 3:9, 15–17; 4:3–5; 5:9). The reasons for this suffering stemmed from the Christians' failure to participate in cultic life in the same way as they had before: the gentiles "are surprised that you do not now join them in the same wild profligacy, and they abuse you" (4:4). According to this author, this same sort of "suffering" was faced by the "brotherhood throughout the world" (5:9).

This brings us to the third point, which pertains the issue of whether or not the congregations addressed by the Apocalypse were necessarily as sectarian as John was (at least in relation to empire). Evidently, the Apocalypse's visionary description of mass slaughter does not (nor does it claim to) represent the actual conditions faced by most Christians living in Roman Asia. The emperor and Roman officials were not engaged in systematic persecution in Asia Minor. We should be cautious, therefore, in assuming that John's sectarian stances regarding the relationship between the Christian assemblies and empire are representative of the stances of most other Christians, *at least based on issues pertaining to persecution*. Considerable primary evidence from Asia concerning the participation of Judean and Christian groups in imperial honors and connections, for instance, would strongly suggest otherwise. While some groups may have been more inclined towards the sectarian stances of the Apocalypse, many others clearly were not. It seems that one of John's purposes is to convince others (like the Nicolaitans and the followers of "Jezebel") to see, as he did,

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22 Cf. Unnik 1980 [1954], 95–96; Elliott 1990 [1981], 78–82; Thompson 1990; Achtemeier 1996, 33–36.



the problems with Roman imperial power and its social, economic, and cultural manifestations in the cities of Asia.

### 3. *Sectarian Depictions of Other Christian Groups in Asia*

Some scholars who generally accept the revised understanding of the character of persecution in the first two centuries nonetheless argue for a sectarian understanding of Christianity in Asia Minor on other grounds, often employing Bryan R. Wilson's sociological typology. Wilson's sect typology, which substantially modifies the church-sect typologies of Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch, was first developed out of his studies of divergent Christian religious movements in western cultural contexts, and later broadened for cross-cultural study of developing countries in *Magic and the Millennium* (1973).<sup>23</sup> According to Wilson, a sect is a "deviant" religious movement primarily characterized by tension with society, and he suggests there are seven main types based on their "response to the world" and a corresponding soteriological perspective. Most importantly for present purposes is the "conversionist" type of sect, for whom the world and those in it are corrupt and can only be changed through the "supernaturally wrought transformation of the self" which takes place through an "emotional transformation conversion experience."<sup>24</sup> The modern, individualistic character of Wilson's model is quite evident here.

Elliott broadly categorizes Christian congregations in Asia Minor as conversionist sects in this sense, stressing the fundamental separation and conflict between such groups and the society in which they lived. In reference to 1 Peter, Elliott states that the "sectarian features of the movement [in Palestine] continued to characterize the Christian communities of Asia Minor and *determine the nature of their interaction with society*."<sup>25</sup> Like the typical diaspora Judean group, the Christian community "drew firm social and religious boundaries between its members and all 'outsiders'" (p. 79). The recipients of 1 Peter, who were literally aliens of the lower-classes faced with dire socioeconomic conditions (according to Elliott), had terminated all previous familial, social, and religious ties or loyalties in order to form "a community set apart and disengaged from the routine affairs of civic and social life" (p. 79). 1 Peter's strategy in addressing these sectarian groups, Elliott stresses, was to emphasize the identity of the Christians as the elect of God and the suffering which they faced in order to further *heighten* their separation from all aspects of the Greco-Roman context (pp. 107, 148).<sup>26</sup>

Other scholars take a similar approach. Harry O. Maier, for instance, also employs Wilson's typology in order to stress that the congregations addressed by Ignatius of Antioch had a strong sense of separation from society. Maier speaks of the "sectarian identity of the Asian churches."

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23 Cf. Wilson 1970, 1990.

24 Wilson 1973, 22-23, also cited by Elliott 1990 [1981], 76. The six other types are: revolutionist (salvation through the supernaturally wrought destruction and transformation of the world); introversionist (salvation through withdrawal from the evil world); manipulationist (salvation through application of the proper means or methods); thaumaturgical (salvation through magic); reformist (salvation through reform of the world); utopian (salvation through the application of divinely given principles).

25 Elliott 1990 [1981], 74 (emphasis mine). Cf. Elliott 1986.

26 Cf. Achtemeier 1996, 52-55.

From their perspective, he suggests, Ignatius “would have appeared as an embodiment of separation from the world” (Maier 1991, 163–68). Maier, like Elliott, is correct to point out the distinctive beliefs, practices, and identities of the Christian groups (e.g. notions of election). However, his overemphasis on separation from society in a very broad sense, failing to distinguish different aspects of life in the city encompassed by his use of the term “society,” does not do justice to the intricacies of everyday life in the cities of Roman Asia. In a similar manner, MacDonald categorizes most Pauline communities as conversionist type sects. She still refers to those addressed by the Pastorals as a sect, even though she admits that there is a lack of any evidence of “world-rejection” which may suggest “a movement away from the sect-type toward the church-type” (MacDonald 1988, 163–66).

#### *4. Problems with Sectarian-Focused Approaches*

There are several difficulties with these sectarian-focused approaches, only some of which can be discussed here. The most fundamental problem is that these approaches do not adequately account for primary evidence that indicates the complexity of group-society interactions. Nor do these approaches fully acknowledge the diversity among both synagogues and congregations. Moreover, evidence from Ignatius’ epistles, the Pastoral epistles, 1 Peter, and the Apocalypse discussed here and in the following chapters shows the difficulties in speaking of all Christian congregations in Asia Minor as sects. My case study of imperial honors and connections provides extensive data that does not fit the common sectarian portrayal of many synagogues and congregations. Archaeological evidence concerning the participation of Judean synagogues in the social and cultural life of cities in Asia Minor likewise problematizes a sectarian portrait.

Before addressing this primary evidence more fully, a general discussion of the difficulties with these scholarly approaches is in order.<sup>27</sup> The term “sect” has come to be used in a variety of ways and there is little reason to question its applicability to certain early Christian groups in the general sense that they were “divergent” cultural groups or “minority religious movements within the context of [other] dominant religious traditions” (Wilson 1973, 11). What I question here is not whether such groups were in important ways “deviant” or distinctive in relation to certain cultural norms in the Greco-Roman world (primarily with regard to their monotheism), nor whether they were in tension with certain aspects of society, both of which may be true for particular groups.

One key problem pertains to how scholars such as Elliott have applied sect typologies, over-emphasizing exclusivity, separation, and tensions with “society” in a broad sense while obscuring other primary evidence concerning specific and more complex dimensions of group-society relations, including imperial dimensions of group-life. Elliott’s application of the model dictates what evidence is considered in the first place. For instance, only after he categorizes the Christian groups as sects does he consider the evidence for 1 Peter’s apparently positive view of Roman authorities and of the “secular model” of the household, which are then taken as secondary. Elliott’s application of the sociological model suffers from a problem also identified by some sociologists. James A. Beckford, for example, points out how the application of church-sect typologies often

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27 Also see White 1988; Holmberg 1990, 77–117; Barton 1993.

involves categorizations based on limited contrasting dualities or oppositions—protest or accommodation, exclusivity or inclusivity—which fail to do justice to the subtleties of social realities, and Beckford even calls for a moratorium on the use of church-sect typologies.<sup>28</sup>

In contrast to those who take a sectarian-focused approach, some scholars interpret literary evidence for Jesus-followers in Asia Minor quite differently and draw a more complicated picture regarding the relationship between particular congregations and specific dimensions of society and culture. Here I provide an overview of some of these other studies, briefly giving some concrete illustrations from primary evidence, including Ignatius' epistles, the Pastoral epistles and 1 Peter.

Unlike Maier, Bruce J. Malina (1978) and William R. Schoedel (1980) both suggest that Ignatius' letters reveal a positive outlook with respect to the place of Jesus-followers within civic life, despite distinctive identities and world views. Schoedel can even state that Ignatius "has the popular culture of the Greek city in his bones" (cited by Carruth 1996, 295). Malina (1978, 87) uses Mary Douglas' idea that the relation of spirit and matter, mind and body, are "symbolic statements about the relation of society and the individual." In this way, he argues that Ignatius' use of binates—flesh-spirit, material help-spiritual help—suggests that spirit works through matter (corresponding to his anti-docetism) and that the individual is subordinate to society, finding his or her freedom *within* its forms.<sup>29</sup>

Several types of evidence from Ignatius illustrate the sort of material obscured by the common sectarian reading. Despite the clear distinction between the Christian assembly (spirit) and the world (flesh), there are indications of positive relations with outsiders in the Ignatian material, both on the part of Ignatius and on the part of Jesus-followers in the cities of Asia.<sup>30</sup> The principal conflicts faced by the Christian assemblies in Asia were internal (docetics and "judaizers"), not external, in Ignatius' view. In those few passages when outsiders are discussed, the attitude is quite positive. Ignatius points out praisingly that the bishop at Tralles commands great respect not only within the assembly, but also among the "godless" (*Trall.* 3.2).

It is in this same letter that Ignatius shows further concerns with the image of the Christians in the view of those outside the group: "Let none of you have a grudge against his neighbor. Give no occasion to the gentiles, in order that the congregation of God may not be blasphemed for a few foolish persons" (*Trall.* 8.2 [LCL]; cf. 1 Peter 2:12; Polycarp, *Phil.* 10.2-3). When Ignatius encourages the congregation at Ephesos to pray for outsiders, he even employs familial language in calling on Christians to treat these people as "brothers" (*Eph.* 10.1-3). One wonders how Meeks would deal with this language of belonging that extends outside the boundaries of the Christian group. For in the case of the use of this language *within* Pauline groups he suggests that by "this kind of [familial] talk members are taught to conceive of only two classes of humanity: the sect and the outsiders" (Meeks 1983, 86). Something more complicated than this dualism is going on in

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28 Beckford 1973, 94-104. See also Eister 1967 and Knudsen et al. 1978 for other critiques.

29 Cf. Ignatius, *Eph* 5.1; 7.2; 8.2; 10.3; *Magn.* 1.1; 13.1; *Trall.* 12.1; *Smyrn.* 3.3; 12.2; 13.2.

30 This despite the fact that Ignatius also emphasizes other respects in which there is a clear contrast between Christians and "the world," which come to the fore especially in the letter to the Romans (*Rom.* 2.2; 3.3; 6.2; 7; cf. *Magn.* 5). But quite often Ignatius seems to have in mind physical existence or the flesh (especially his own life which he expects to lose), wealth, and other such material things when he uses the term "the world" in such a negative way. Usually Ignatius does not seem to have outsiders in mind with these negative comments.

Ignatius here.

Further evidence for complicated group-society interactions comes from the Pastoral epistles, which further suggests the inadequacy of applying the sect model. Labelling the Pastoral epistles “bourgeois” (*bürgerlich*, as does Dibelius) is problematic in the least. However, the characteristics of the letters that led scholars to come up with the label do indeed suggest an approach to leadership in Asia Minor which in some respects accepted and/or transformed some Hellenistic values of “good citizenship” and other conventions of civic life.<sup>31</sup>

Evidence from the Pastoral epistles should caution us against assuming that all congregations were sects. I discuss passages relating to imperial-related issues extensively in the next chapter (1 Tim 2:1-2; Titus 3:1-2), but it is worth at least noting some other evidence here. As with Ignatius, the author of the Pastoral epistles clearly emphasizes the distinct status of believers as “the elect” with a “holy calling” (cf. Titus 1:1; 2 Tim 1:9-10; 2:10) and he contrasts this with their pre-Christian status (Titus 2:12; 3:3-8). Yet, as in Ignatius’ epistles, the principal threat or conflict which the author perceives comes from those “unbelieving” opponents or false teachers *within* the congregations (cf. 1 Tim 1:3-11; 5:13-16; 6:3-7; 2 Tim 4:3-4; Titus 1:13-15), not from outsiders.

This author is, in fact, very concerned with how outsiders (non-Christians) perceive the congregations. The author’s advice regarding proper behavior among members of different status reflects both his prevalent concern for the view of outsiders and his acceptance of certain values of Greco-Roman culture. The requirements for assuming leadership in the Christian assembly, “the household of God” (1 Tim 3:15), are expressed as follows:

Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable. . . . He must manage his household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God’s church? . . . [M]oreover he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and the snare of the slanderer (1 Tim 3:2-7).

Christian slaves are also to behave in ways that are pleasing to non-Christian masters: “Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honor (*timē*), so that the name of God and the teaching may not be defamed” (1 Tim 6:1; cf. Titus 2:9-10). Young women, too, should live in a way that is acceptable to outsiders: “So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, rule their households, and give the enemy no occasion to revile us” (1 Tim 5:14). They should be trained “to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind, and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be discredited” (Titus 2:3-5). These are cultural values that were widely accepted within the context of the Greek city. Overall, the Pastoral epistles’ approach to the role of women, which is limited primarily to the household, also reflects a concern with the perception of outsiders. Alternative trajectories in Asia Minor, such as those evident in the *Acts of Paul* and the Phrygian (Montanist) movement, suggest a far more prominent role for women. They also show that subversion of cultural values concerning marriage and the household could be among the accusations that outsiders made against Christians.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast to Elliott’s sectarian-focused approach, other scholars draw a very different picture

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31 See Dibelius 1931; Spicq 1969. For further discussion see Kidd 1990. Cf. MacDonald 1988, 160-202.

32 Cf. *Acts of Paul* 3; Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.55; D.R. MacDonald 1983, 59-65; M.Y. MacDonald 1996, throughout.

regarding the social strategy and situation of 1 Peter. Writing about thirty years before Elliott, W.C. van Unnik states: “In every respect the relation with fellow-men is central, not retreat from the world, but a life in the given conditions.”<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Leonhard Goppelt observes that the attempt to gain a place for Christians *within* Hellenistic society “shapes the theology of 1 Peter in a decisive way.”<sup>34</sup> David L. Balch’s studies (1981, 1986), too, challenge Elliott’s portrait of the social situation and strategy of 1 Peter, arguing instead that the household code, at least, represents some degree of acculturation in order to lessen group–society tensions.

In certain respects the author of 1 Peter advocates the adoption or continuation of *some* Hellenistic values and practices, including those pertaining to “good works” (or benefaction) and honors for authorities (1 Peter 2:11–17). The household code as a whole (1 Peter 2:11–3:7) suggests a concern with the positive view of outsiders and promotes the adoption of some Greco–Roman cultural values within congregations. Yet 1 Peter’s advocacy of certain values and practices does not mean that he suggested an openness to all other aspects of that same society or culture, least of all the “futile ways inherited from your fathers” (1:18), that is, a lifestyle of “passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry” (4:3).

Overall, the manner in which the sect typologies are often applied to early Christianity does not adequately account for such evidence. Before considering further primary evidence to this effect, it is worth tapping into some other insights from the social sciences which may help us to recognize the complexities of group–society relations. Balch’s study of the household code in 1 Peter points out the value of studies of acculturation, for instance: “Instead of the assumption that ‘all gentile modes of behavior’ are sinful, anthropologists studying acculturation emphasize that there is a ‘selection’ by the receiving culture among cultural traits of the donor culture. Some foreign traits are accepted and/or adapted; others are rejected” (Balch 1986, 86).

### Insights from the Social Sciences: Assimilation and Acculturation

Anthropological and sociological insights concerning assimilation and acculturation, or culture contact, will be useful here.<sup>35</sup> Since writing the first edition of this book, I have also further developed and applied these methods in a study on *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians* (2009). That work also takes further steps in explaining the category of “cultural minority groups” insofar as this category may help us approach the study of immigrant associations and others antiquity. Although these theories of assimilation are developed primarily in connection with ethno–cultural groups of the modern era, the insights they provide can help us to understand our evidence for group–society relations among ancient Judean ethnic groups and groups of Jesus–followers in some respects. J. Milton Yinger’s study (1981, 249) defines assimilation as “a process of

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33 Unnik 1980 [1954], 101. Elliott (1990 [1981], 93, 160) largely ignores van Unnik’s studies on 1 Peter, mentioning him only in two endnotes without discussion.

34 Goppelt 1993 [1978], 161, 154–61. Cf. Goppelt 1982 [1976]; Winter 1994, 11–40.

35 Here I depend on the following anthropological and sociological studies: Redfield et al. 1936; Barnett et al. 1954; Herskovits 1958; Berry 1980; Yinger 1981; Kim and Gudykunst 1988; Marger 1991, 116–30; Elise 1995. I am indebted to Balch (1986) for sparking my interest in the subject; others have recently employed notions of assimilation or acculturation in studies of Christianity or Judaism in antiquity (cf. Barclay 1996; Snyder 1998).

boundary reduction that can occur when members of two or more societies or of smaller cultural groups meet.” At the same time, he stresses that assimilation need not lead to loss of boundaries between a group and society, or of group identity. Instead, “assimilation can range from the smallest beginnings of interaction and cultural exchange to the thorough fusion of the groups” (1981, 249).

Scholars often distinguish between sub-processes of assimilation, the most important here being (1) cultural assimilation (or acculturation) and (2) structural assimilation.<sup>36</sup> First, *acculturation* refers to “the phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield et al. 1936, 149). Acculturation can involve the selection, adoption, and adaptation of a variety of cultural traits including language, dress, religion, and other cultural conventions, beliefs, and values which make up the way of life and world view of a particular cultural group. Anthropologists and sociologists emphasize the selective and transformative character of intercultural transmission: “the patterns and values of the receiving culture seem to function as *selective screens* in a manner that results in the enthusiastic acceptance of some elements, the firm rejection of other elements”; furthermore, “the elements which are transmitted undergo transformations” in the process (Barnett et al. 1954). At both the individual and group levels acculturation need not be substitutive, replacing a set of cultural traits or radically changing a world view; rather it can be additive, allowing for the continuation of a particular individual’s or group’s identity and cultural framework despite acculturation (Yinger 1981, 252).

Again, acculturation can progress a very long way without the disintegration of a group’s boundaries or existence in relation to a larger societal or cultural entity. John W. Berry (1980, 13) emphasizes that there are different forms of adaptation in cases of culture contact, some of which involve a two-fold process that entails the “maintenance of cultural integrity as well as the movement to become an integral part of a larger societal framework.” Similarly, it is also important to remain aware of the processes of *dissimilation* which can occur at certain points in a group’s history, a concept explained by Yinger. That is, certain levels of acculturation or assimilation in the case of a particular cultural group can also be accompanied by conscious efforts to re-assert and strengthen specific intra-societal differences: “powerful assimilative forces are matched by renewed attention to socio-cultural differences” (Yinger 1981, 257, 257–61).

The second main sub-process of assimilation of interest to us here is *structural assimilation*, which can be discussed in terms of both primary (or informal) and secondary (or formal) levels. At the primary level, individual members of a given ethnic or cultural group can interact with persons from other cultural groups through personal social network connections, including memberships in neighborhoods, clubs, and associations.<sup>37</sup> This will become relevant when we come to consider individuals’ multiple memberships or interactions within other institutions and sub-groups of society in the ancient world. The occupational connections of Judeans and Christians are especially important in this regard, for as Yinger (1981, 254) points out incorporation within occupational networks “almost certainly leads to at least some acculturation, identification [i.e. psychological

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36 Cf. Yinger 1981; Marger 1991, 116–29.

37 Cf. Yinger 1981, 254; Marger 1991, 118; Elise 1995, 275.

identification with occupation or fellow-workers], and amalgamation [e.g. inter-marriage].”

The secondary level of structural assimilation involves members of a particular cultural group becoming more evident and participatory in the formal political, legal, social, or economic institutions of society. Total assimilation at this level would entail equal access to power and privilege within the major societal institutions. Yet, again, there are numerous possibilities regarding the nature and degree of these secondary relations.

Now that we have some idea of the processes of assimilation and acculturation, we can turn to the question of how this may shed light on ancient settings and on the issue of interactions between synagogues or congregations and surrounding society. Before addressing evidence for synagogues, which are clearly ethnically-based, it is important to explain how social scientific insights concerning acculturation might apply to followers of Jesus.

Many congregations of Jesus-followers were not primarily Judean in membership and, therefore, not strictly speaking ethnic associations in the sense that synagogues were. We can, however, understand congregations, like synagogues, in terms of “cultural minority groups” with a *distinctive cultural complex* (a specific configuration of social and cultural factors, traits, values, and practices) (now see Harland 2009). This cultural complex derived, in part, from the Judean world view and way of life. For example, the author of 1 Peter (4:3–5) can expect his primarily non-Judean audience in Asia Minor to understand his characterization of them as “exiles” of the “diaspora” (1:1–2), drawing heavily on Judean ethnic identity (“chosen people,” “holy nation,” “a people belonging to God”) to express their distinctiveness in relation to surrounding society (cf. 1 Peter 2:9–10). The most distinctive cultural element that, in some respects, set both Judeans and Jesus-followers apart as cultural minority groups was their peculiar devotion to honoring only one god to the exclusion of others (“monotheism”) in a society where it was the norm to honor more than one god and to accept the existence of the gods of other peoples (“polytheism”). So in some ways we can accurately speak of both synagogues and congregations (as well as some other ethnic associations, such as Samaritans) as cultural minority groups even though many of their members may have been life-long inhabitants in the societies found in Roman Asia Minor. So insights concerning acculturation, can, if carefully adapted, provide a working framework for considering group-society relations among cultural minority groups such as these.

Assimilation is a complex, two-way process that works at both the (1) individual and (2) group levels. (1) The entrance of a new *individual* member (e.g. a gentile or a Judean) into a group with a distinctive cultural complex could be part of this cultural exchange. As social scientific studies emphasize, all individuals are *culture-carriers* who bring with them a set of cultural traits pertaining to a particular way of life and world view. The case of a new (gentile) member entering a Christian assembly will be appropriate as an illustration here. Processes of acculturation would take place even though many other members may also come from a similar background (i.e. gentiles that had lived their entire lives in a particular locale in Asia Minor), since in some respects the group maintained a cultural minority configuration that differed from surrounding society. A potential or new member’s cultural traits were profoundly shaped by and, at some point, consonant with those of surrounding culture, more so than with the distinctive elements in the cultural complex of the congregation of Jesus-followers. A person’s experience in associating with individual Christians (or



Judean-Christians) and subsequently in joining a congregation, then, would entail a process of culture contact or acculturation. The person would go through a process of *enculturation* into the specific cultural complex of a particular group. Exclusive devotion to the Judean God was a key distinguishing factor in the case of Judean and Christian groups. Enculturation would entail a selective process of continuation, rejection, adoption, and adaptation of specific social and cultural elements by the new member (both of her own cultural heritage and of the newly joined group with its distinctive cultural elements). But this would also entail the potential sociocultural modification of specific elements of the group as well, especially as others joined and interacted with fellow-members.

Presumably, though, the enculturation of a new member would vary from one person to the next and would not necessarily involve complete assimilation, so to speak, to a particular group's sociocultural matrix. So the new member would not necessarily or even likely cut off all previous social connections or affiliations within networks in the civic setting even though membership in a such a cultural minority group could influence, to varying degrees, transformations in the nature of such contacts. My point is that we should not be surprised to find a certain degree of agreement in *some* of the social and cultural values and practices between members of congregations and other inhabitants within the Greek cities, despite the differences which would, perhaps increasingly, develop between a given new member and other people within her social circles in the city. These differences would be particularly present with respect to changes in the positions of the (Judean) God, the (Greco-Roman) gods and others (including emperors) in the cosmological framework or world view of the member, which could also have significant impacts on behavior and practices. These circumstances concerning entrance of new members would also influence the dynamics of cultural or structural assimilation (or dissimulation) of the group in relation to society.

(2) As cultural minority *groups* synagogues and congregations living alongside other associations within the structures of the Greek city would also be affected in numerous ways by contacts with the social and cultural institutions, conventions, practices, and values of surrounding society. Any given synagogue or congregation could adopt, adapt, and develop ways of finding a place within civic society akin to the ways of other groups in that setting, as the case of imperial honors illustrates. It seems that many Judean groups in Asia Minor had been living there for extended periods of time, sometimes even centuries, and this would play a role in the extent of culture contact or acculturation. For as Martin N. Marger (1991, 127) points out, this temporal factor is often an important variable: "the more recent a group's entry into the society, the more resistance there is [both on the part of the group and of society] to its assimilation." A corollary of this is that groups "with alien ways are seen differently after they have lived in the society for several generations." Certain levels of assimilation and the continuation of strong group-identity (including processes of dissimulation) are not mutually exclusive.

The main point of this section has been to suggest that a complex scenario *akin to* processes outlined in social scientific theories of acculturation, assimilation and dissimulation (rather than overly simplistic sectarian typologies) should be envisioned for synagogues and congregations (or individuals) within the ancient Greek city. While particular groups (or individual members or leaders) might firmly reject certain aspects of the values, symbols, conventions, and institutions of

Greco-Roman culture and society, they might also maintain, accept or adapt others, without necessarily undermining or losing their own distinctive way of life, world view or specific identity. There would be a range of possibilities for interactions between a given group and society without the disintegration of group boundaries. We will witness complexities in group-society relations and in levels of assimilation presently in connection with many synagogues in Asia Minor and, in the following chapter, with respect to imperial honors among both synagogues and congregations.

### A Revised View of Judean Synagogues in the Diaspora

Not so long ago, it was quite common for scholars to depict Judean groups of the diaspora as isolated and introverted communities living in hostile environments, largely alien to the institutions, conventions, and values of society in the Roman empire. This exclusivity ensured their identity over against “syncretism,” serving as a “barrier against the influence of the alien environment,” as Victor Tcherikover puts it.<sup>38</sup> This depiction of Judean groups as sectarian in the sense of being completely separate from society has continued to influence discussions of congregations in the same setting, including those of Meeks and Elliott.

However, recent studies are beginning to challenge this view and instead emphasize the variety among Judean groups with many such groups participating within certain areas of civic life despite their distinctive identities.<sup>39</sup> John J. Collins (1983, 129) states that “the dominant tendency of Diaspora Judeanry was to live as loyal subjects of their gentile masters and participate in the culture and society as fully as possible within the constraints of their religious tradition.” Paul R. Trebilco’s (1991, 187) study of Judeans in Asia Minor specifically finds that “the Hellenistic *polis* accommodated considerable diversity of population without demanding uniformity,” and that “a degree of integration did not mean the abandonment of an active attention to Judean tradition or of Judean distinctiveness.”

Along similar lines, John M.G. Barclay’s study of Judeans in the diaspora and in Asia specifically proposes a range of possibilities in levels of assimilation. There could be high assimilation among Judean individuals like Niketas at Iasos, who in the second century BCE made financial contributions to a Dionysiac festival (*CIJ* 749; cf. *CIJ* 82 [Oropos, Greece]); medium assimilation among many Judeans in Asia who maintained their distinctive identities while also being integrated within civic life; and low assimilation among others, especially at times and places where conflicts with outsiders were more prevalent (Barclay 1996, 259–81, 320–35). These revised understandings of synagogues and the Greek or Roman city (along with evidence concerning other associations) provide instructive analogies concerning a spectrum of possibilities in group-society interactions among some congregations within cities in Asia Minor, I would argue.

Participation of Judeans in civic life is attested in several ways, some of which seriously undermine the notion that most Judean groups, like Christian ones, were fundamentally sectarian or utterly exclusive in terms of membership, “supplanting all other loyalties,” as Meeks puts it. There is clear evidence from the province of Asia (especially epigraphic evidence) that being a

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38 Tcherikover 1966 [1959], 296. Cf. Smallwood 1976, 123. Also see the critique of this view by Trebilco 1991, 186, 263 nn.1–3.

39 Cf. Kraabel 1968; Blanchetière 1974, 1984; Rajak 1985; Trebilco 1991, 167–85; Cohen 1993; Gruen 1998.

member in a Judean group did not mean the dissolution of all participation in conventions, institutions, and constituent groups of the Greek city. There were times when the practices and relations of some synagogues were akin to those attested with other associations.

Here I focus as much as possible on the first two centuries but enter into the third where helpful, briefly discussing as examples three main areas of participation in civic life, involving (1) sociocultural institutions, (2) social networks of benefaction, and (3) other sub-groups of society, including guilds or associations. The following chapter discusses at length another area of potential participation in or rejection of conventions of society among both synagogues and assemblies, focusing on imperial dimensions of civic life. Evidence along these lines attests to dynamics of cultural and structural assimilation among Judean groups or individuals, but it does not tell of the disappearance of boundaries between group and society, nor of the disintegration of the specific identities, world views, and cultural practices of these groups and their members.

(1) First of all, like many other associations (or their members), Judeans could be present as participants within the central sociocultural institutions of the Greek city (*polis*). The theater was among the focal points of civic life, since this is where celebrations and performances were held and where the assembly of the people met. At the theater in Miletos there was reserved seating for the “Judeans and god-fearers” (or: “Judeans who are also god-fearers”) alongside other guilds such as the “emperor-loving goldsmiths” (*IMilet 940* = *AGRW* 183, d and f; II CE or later; see figures 23–24). Some Judeans could also participate in the activities of the gymnasium, even forming age-group associations or joining those that already existed. There was a reserved place for the association of “younger Judeans” (*Iouda[i]ōn neōterōn*) at Hypaipa (*IJO II 47*; see figure 46); a Judean among within a group at Lasos, most likely an organization of youths (ephebes) (*IIasos* 284 = *IJO II 22*); and Judeans (or perhaps Christians) as members of the local elders’ organization at Eumeneia, all dating to the second or third centuries.<sup>40</sup>



Figure 46: Facsimile of *IEph 3822*: “Place of the younger Judeans.”

(2) Secondly, *some* Judean groups actively participated within civic networks of benefaction in a manner comparable to other associations, which could also involve interaction with the principal civic institutions. A lengthy inscription from Smyrna in the reign of Hadrian, for example, lists the donations to the city by several individuals and groups including an imperial cult high-priest, theologians, hymn-singers, and “*hoi pote Ioudaioi*” (*ISmyrna* 697 = *CIJ* 742 = *IGR* IV 1431 = *CIG* 3148). There is some debate surrounding the meaning of the latter phrase, since it is otherwise unattested. The traditional interpretation of the phrase in religious terms as “the former Judeans,” namely apostate Judeans who had repudiated their faith, is problematic, however. As I argue at length elsewhere,<sup>41</sup> the term *Ioudaioi* is best understood in a geographical sense, with the phrase

40 For the Eumeneia inscription, see Robert 1960c, 436–39. Cf. Lüderitz 1983, 11–21, nos. 6–7, on Judeans among the ephebes at Cyrene in the late I BCE–early I CE.

41 Now see the full discussion in Harland 2009, 150–152. I still hold to my arguments there with the exception of my sentence (on p. 152) concerning the meaning of *prin* (drawn in as analogous with *pote*), which may be problematic and in need of revision.

referring to “the former Judeans” (an immigrant association of Judeans). There is evidence of similar interactions by synagogues within networks at Sardis. In a decree from an earlier era recorded by Josephus, the civic institutions there provided the Judean group (which is elsewhere called a *synodos*) with a place to meet (*Antiquities* 14.259–61 [ca. 49 BCE]). Later on, the Judeans at Sardis met within the bath-gymnasium complex, a central cultural institution of the Greek city, but there is considerable debate regarding the dating of this synagogue.<sup>42</sup>

Such evidence of positive relations does not, of course, preclude incidents when Judean groups’ relations with civic inhabitants or institutions or even Roman officials was rocky, especially in the unstable closing years of the republic (the decades leading up to 31 BCE).<sup>43</sup> Yet, though sporadic conflicts could certainly arise in later years, the more stable conditions in Asia Minor which followed the establishment of the “peace of Rome” (*pax Romana*) would lessen tensions between synagogues and other inhabitants of the cities (cf. Barclay 1996, 279–81).



Figure 47: Family grave of Glykon involving guilds on Judean festivals at Hierapolis (IJO II 196).

42 On the bath-gymnasium complex as a whole, see Yegül 1986. On the Judeans and the synagogue, see Bonz 1990, 1993 (who dates it to the late third century or early fourth century). However, Jodi Magness now shows that the mosaics, at least, date to the sixth century or later (Magness 2005). The Greek inscriptions from the synagogue are now published in Kroll 2001.

43 Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.213–16 (Parion) and 14.244–46 (Miletos). Cf. Stanley 1996, though he over-emphasizes anti-Roman sentiment among gentiles in the cities of Asia Minor.

(3) A third illustration of the involvements of Judeans in the life of the cities pertains to connections with other sub-groups. Despite the partial nature of epigraphic evidence, there are indications that members of synagogues could continue to maintain important connections—for social, business or other purposes—with individuals and groups in the cities, including affiliations with other associations. As I detail in another publication (see Harland 2009, 136–140, 156–160), belonging to more than one association was quite common in the Roman empire (see, e.g., *Digest* 47.22.1.2) and there are also indications that Judeans, too, could belong to more than one group or association (alongside or instead of membership in the local synagogue). One of the clearest cases that I deal with at length in the other work comes from Hierapolis in Phrygia, where it seems that Judeans belonged to the local guilds of carpet-weavers and purple-dyers, who took care of a family grave on Judean (Passover and Pentecost) and Roman (New Year's) festivals (*IJO II* 196 = *AGRW* 152; see figure 47).<sup>44</sup>

Though moving out of the geographical bounds of the present paper, evidence in Philo (the Judean philosopher) indicates that Judeans in first-century Alexandria were commonly involved in trade as shippers, merchants and artisans (Philo, *Against Flaccus* 57). Torrey Seland's study shows that some Judeans also joined local guilds or associations in the cities. Philo “does not strictly and totally forbid participation, but he is very critical of the associations, and skeptical of joining them” (Seland 1996, 110; see *On Drunkenness* 20–26; *Embassy to Gaius* 3.155–59). In light of these indications, it would be reasonable to suggest the possibility of similar multiple affiliations or memberships among other Judeans, as well as Jesus-followers.<sup>45</sup> It turns out that this may help us to understanding some practices among Jesus-followers addressed in the Apocalypse.

Evidently, Judean groups and their members were often integrated within civic life in several ways, and this sometimes involved memberships in, or affiliations with, sub-groups within the Greek city. This sort of evidence throws into question many scholars' over-emphasis on the exclusivity of membership in synagogues (and, often by implication, congregations), but it does *not necessarily* involve a lack of some distinctive cultural characteristics on the part of Judeans in relation to society at large, nor the disintegration of group-boundaries.

## Conclusion

When Meeks sets about looking for models or analogies in the ancient world with which to compare Christian groups, including structures such as the household, association, philosophical school, and synagogue, he finds that although the synagogue provides the “nearest and most natural model,” “none of these categories quite fits” (Meeks 1983, 80, 74). In each case he suggests that the *differences* between congregations and a given model outweigh the similarities in a way that makes further comparison less than fruitful. One begins to get the impression that Meeks views Christian groups not only as distinctive but as *unique* in the sense that they are *incomparable*. The

44 See Harland 2009, 123–142, which expands on Harland 2006b.

45 Turning west, two inscriptions from Ostia seem to suggest that a Christian there was also a member in the shippers' guild (ca. 192 CE); it is worth noting that Marcion (who was founder of a set of Christian groups and came from Sinope in Pontus) was himself a ship-captain a couple of generations earlier (Lane Fox 1986, 295; Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heresies* 30.1–2; Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.13.1).



supposed substantive differences which Meeks perceives, when investigated further, need considerable qualification or rejection.

Meeks assumes that the sociological model of the “sect” does serve as a useful model of comparison in relation to groups of Jesus-followers. Not surprisingly, this model is used in a way that stresses features of congregations which set them apart from their environment, further affirming their uniqueness and incomparability. These two features of the approach—one concerning the incomparability of most ancient models and the other concerning sectarianism—may be partially understood in terms of a broader scholarly tradition (sometimes with apologetic overtones) which avoids comparison because of a concern to insulate Christianity, but also Judaism, from the possibility of “influences” or “borrowings” from the cultural environment. Jonathan Z. Smith’s *Drudgery Divine* (1990) thoroughly traces this scholarly tradition as it manifests itself in discussions of the mysteries and early Christianity (cf. Gasparro 1985, xiii-xx). Among other things Smith points out how Judaism (with its accepted influences) has often been used as a device to insulate Christianity from the influences of the “pagan” environment. He also observes that religions of the ancient Mediterranean are often spoken of as, in a broad sense, the “same,” while Christianity is viewed as “different” or “unique,” and hence incomparable. As Smith argues, analogical comparison can enrich our understanding of various phenomena in antiquity.

There are clear indications that a comparison of associations with both Judean synagogues and Christian congregations may be a fruitful scholarly enterprise resulting in a better understanding of groups of various kinds. There are significant basic similarities apparent between associations, on the one hand, and both congregations and synagogues, on the other, which is not surprising considering the fact that these groups lived and developed within similar civic settings. In broad terms, associations, synagogues, and congregations were small, non-compulsory groups that could draw their membership from several possible social network connections within civic settings. All could be either relatively homogeneous or heterogeneous with regard to social and gender composition; all engaged in regular meetings that involved a variety of interconnected social, ritual, and other purposes, one group differing from the next in the specifics of activities; all depended in various ways upon commonly accepted social conventions such as benefaction for financial support (e.g. a meeting-place) and the development of leadership structures; and all could engage in at least some degree of external contacts, both positive and negative, with other individuals, benefactors, groups or institutions in the civic context.

Although an academic approach to comparison does not necessitate that the subjects under investigation actually recognize similarities among the phenomena that the scholar sees value in comparing, it is striking that in antiquity Christian, Judean and Greco-Roman authors alike *did* compare the groups. Despite peculiarities (especially the denial of the gods of others), both synagogues and congregations could be viewed by contemporaries as associations in the usual sense, and there are clear indications that these groups could also understand themselves as such. In one of the earliest Roman descriptions of Christians, for instance, Pliny the Younger (governor of Bithynia-Pontus) writes to the emperor Trajan concerning the Christ-devotees who had been brought before him, describing their gatherings in terms familiar from the ritual activities of associations (e.g. prayer, hymns) and confirms that they had obeyed his edict regarding meetings of

associations (*hetaeriae*, sometimes a synonym for *collegia*; *Letters* 10.96.7–8 = *AGRW* L40). In the midst of his ridiculing satire on the (once) Christian Peregrinus, Lucian of Samosata characterizes him as a leader of a “society” (*thiasarch*); he also speaks of Christianity as a “new initiation rite” (*kainēn tautēn teletēn*)” (*The Passing of Peregrinus* 11 = *AGRW* L17). Similarly, the critic Celsus characterizes the followers of Jesus as “members of a society” (*thiasōtai*), though he specifically complains about the Christians’ strange avoidance of “setting up altars, images, and temples,” which he interprets as a “sure token of an obscure and secret association [*koinōnias*]”—but an “association” nonetheless (in Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.23; 8.17; cf. 1.1). We have seen that both Judeans and Jesus-followers, too, identified their groups using common terminology for associations, and that several authors, including Philo and Tertullian, explicitly compared the activities of Judean or Christian associations with their “inferior,” “pagan” counterparts.<sup>46</sup>

The shared language of identity and the comparison between such groups is not surprising since congregations and synagogues were, like the local devotees of Zeus or Dionysos or the guild of purple-dyers, relatively small, unofficial groups that assembled regularly to socialize, share communal meals, and honor both their earthly and their divine benefactors. From the perspective of an outsider in antiquity, this general similarity might help to make sense of what was in other respects quite strange: a group that insisted that only its god and no one else’s was deserving of recognition or honor (a sentiment evident in Celsus’ comments). From an (ancient) Judean or Christian perspective, describing oneself in terms drawn from the world of associations might simultaneously establish a sense of place within local culture or society while also forming a basis from which to assert distinctiveness and even preeminence (for the group or its God).

Attention to similarities among associations, synagogues, and congregations, then, is not meant to underplay variations among each of these three types of groups, as well variance in the individual identities of specific groups of any kind. Nor is this meant to ignore the culturally distinctive elements in the world views, values, and practices of both synagogues and congregations (as well as some other ethnic associations) which could distinguish them as cultural minority groups. Attention to both similarities and differences among associations with regard to imperial aspects of civic life will now further our understanding of the individual ways in which such groups and their members navigated and found a place for themselves within the sociocultural landscape of the Greek city under Roman rule.

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46 Philo, *On the Contemplative Life* (= *AGRW* L9); *Special Laws* 2.145–46; *Embassy to Gaius* 312–13 (= L37); *On Virtues* 33.178; Tertullian, *Apology* 38–39 (= L18); Eusebius, *H.E.* 10.1.8 (= L21); cf. Seland 1996, 110–27.





## 8 / JUDEANS, JESUS-FOLLOWERS, AND IMPERIAL HONORS

### Introduction

Our discussion of associations has shown that groups of various kinds maintained relations within the civic setting and that imperial cults and connections played a significant role for some groups. There were different levels of integration within the Greek city (*polis*) and the empire. After casting doubt on common wholesale categorizations of Judean synagogues and Christian congregations as “sects”, I have just argued that these groups deserve comparison with other associations with respect to involvements in sociocultural life at the local level. Rather than an oversimplified sectarian reading which assumes the centrality of tension and separation, I suggested a more complex scenario for group-society relations entailing a range of possibilities with regard a group’s participation in, or separation from, specific social and cultural practices within the Greek city under Roman rule. The case of Judean groups in Asia Minor showed that some synagogues, like associations, were active participants within certain areas of civic life.

The purpose of this chapter is to re-assess the evidence regarding imperial honors and connections among both synagogues and congregations through a comparison with the pattern previously outlined in the case of associations. This roots us in realities of life for groups rather than merely theorizing in a vacuum concerning group-society interaction. This comparative case study sheds light on areas of both participation and non-participation, positive interaction and tension. It also draws attention to a range of possibilities in group-society relations among diverse synagogues and assemblies within the same geographical region. There were different levels of participation in these areas of society.

With regard to positive interaction, some synagogues of Judeans and assemblies of Christ-devotees, like associations, could be involved in conventions of civic life relating to honors for emperors and imperial representatives, participating within relations that linked the Greek city to province and empire. Furthermore, the emperors were significant for the internal life of some synagogues and assemblies, including prayers for the emperors and empire. This is a trajectory of engagement visible in 1 Peter, the Pastoral epistles, Polycarp (bishop of Smyrna), and Melito (bishop of Sardis), representing what I call a *moderate position*. This position can be placed within the broader context of early Christianity with reference to Paul’s letter to the Romans, *1 Clement*, and Luke-Acts. This is the political posture against which we can begin to understand the alternate stance and strategy of John’s Apocalypse, which instead promoted strict sectarian boundaries and a much lower participation-level in the life of the Greek city.

Alongside positive interaction, there were also areas of non-participation and tension which I put into proper perspective in the following chapter. For, unlike some associations, virtually all Judeans and Christians, at least as groups, refrained from active involvement in rituals (such as sacrifices and mysteries) which implied recognition of the emperors as gods. This had implications regarding tensions between these groups and society. Yet we should not exaggerate the importance of non-participation in imperial cults specifically, since these cults were embedded

within cultural life in the Greek cities of Asia Minor. The significance of non-participation in imperial cults for our comprehension of group-society relations should be understood within the broader framework of Judeans' and Christians' failure to participate fully in sacrifices and other honors for any gods other than their own, including the emperors as gods. This was sometimes viewed as "atheism" by some Greeks, Romans, Syrians, and others. This failure could occasionally lead to tensions in relation to others in the civic setting. Attention to these areas of both involvement and avoidance furthers our understanding of how some synagogues and congregations found a place for themselves within the sociocultural matrix of the Greek city under Roman rule, despite areas of tension. It also clarifies the ways in which these groups simultaneously maintained their distinctive identities centred on honoring the Judean God exclusively.

Discussion of neglected areas of positive interaction as well as areas of tension provides a context in which to reassess specific aspects of the Apocalypse of John in the following chapter. Clearly, John disapproved of Christians participating in social, cultic, and economic practices of civic life, especially imperial dimensions of civic life. He advocated a sectarian perspective, drawing sharp boundaries between the congregations and society. Yet this is only one side of a conversation, for a significant number of Judeans and Jesus-followers in the cities of Asia Minor, it seems, were more open towards participating in certain aspects of the life in the city. After briefly discussing attitudes towards the Roman empire in Judean apocalyptic literature, I go on to evidence concerning Judean and then Christian participation in imperial aspects of civic life, which further challenges the common sectarian reading of these groups.

### **Judean Literature, Roman Imperialism and Group-Practice**

In light of diversity within ancient Judean culture, it is not surprising to find differing viewpoints with regard to the Romans and their empire within Judean literature.<sup>1</sup> Strong criticisms of Rome and its rulers come to the fore precisely in writings which are, by nature of genre, concerned with political powers, national calamities, and their relation to the unfolding of God's cosmological plan, especially apocalyptic and oracular writings.

Yet the relation between rhetoric and the reality of Judean group-life is not easy to discern.<sup>2</sup> In the biblical commentaries associated with the Qumran community, for instance, we find references to the Romans (*Kittim*) both as objects of God's vengeance and as tools by which God brings about his eschatological plan.<sup>3</sup> As George J. Brooke's (1991, 159) study cautions, the "image of empire" that emerges is most often controlled by the motifs of scripture, telling us more about methods of biblical interpretation than it does of actual events or perceptions of the Romans or their empire among these Judeans specifically.

Understandably, the Romans' destruction of the temple in Jerusalem was among the focal points of expressions of hostility in literature. Both *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* relate the second destruction of the temple (70 CE) in the code of the first (586 BCE), presenting the destruction as God's punishment for Israel's disobedience in which ruling powers (Babylon / Rome) are

1 Cf. Bruce 1978; Alexander 1991.

2 Cf. Momigliano 1987, 141; Goodman 1991, 222-24.

3 Cf. 4QpNah 1-2; 4QpIsa 7-10; 1QpPs 9; 1QpHab 2-4, 6.

functionaries in bringing about God's ultimate plan.<sup>4</sup> Within this framework we find *4 Ezra* nonetheless harshly condemning the Roman empire in a manner comparable to John's Apocalypse: "you will surely disappear, you eagle, and your terrifying wings, and your most evil little wings, and your malicious heads, and your most evil talons, and your whole worthless body, so that the whole earth, freed from your violence, may be refreshed and relieved, and may hope for the judgement and mercy of him who made it" (*4 Ezra* 11.45-46).<sup>5</sup> Further on, the same author denounces Asia Minor, along with Egypt and Syria, for its affiliations with Babylon / Rome: "And you, O Asia, who share in the glamour of Babylon and the glory of her person—woe to you, miserable wretch! For you have made yourself like her; you have decked out your daughters in harlotry to please and glory in your lovers, who have always lusted after you. You have imitated that hateful harlot in all her deeds and devices" (*4 Ezra* 15.46-49). It is unlikely that we would find the (probably Palestinian) Judean circles in which such literature was produced or read devoting time to honoring the Roman emperors, but we cannot generalize from this regarding the actual practice of Judean groups at other times and in other places.

Similar rhetoric against the Roman empire appears within oracles attributed to the Judean Sibyl (a prophetess known as Sabbe or Sambathe), some of which actually refer to Asia Minor specifically. In particular, one oracle incorporated within the third book, whose initial context of circulation may very well have been Roman Asia in the first century BCE,<sup>6</sup> focuses on economic exploitation in railing against the Roman imperial presence in Asia:

However much wealth Rome received from tribute-bearing Asia, Asia will receive three times that much again from Rome and will repay her deadly arrogance to her. Whatever number from Asia served the house of Italians, twenty times that number of Italians will be serfs in Asia. . . . O luxurious golden offspring of Latium, Rome, virgin, often drunken with your weddings with many suitors (*Sibylline Oracles* 3.350-57).<sup>7</sup>

Similar sentiments regarding Roman imperial extortion of Asia and other regions continue to be echoed in other oracles as well, some of them written in light of the destruction of the temple in 70 CE.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, later oracles of the Judean Sibyl actually demonstrate positive attitudes towards Rome and certain emperors (*Sibylline Oracles* 11-13 [III CE]).

For several reasons, there are difficulties in extracting general Judean attitudes about, or practices regarding, the Roman empire or emperors from such literature, especially with respect to Judean groups in the diaspora.<sup>9</sup> First, by nature of genre, oracles of the Sibyls (whether Judean or not) and apocalyptic writings were concerned with prophetic doom and, especially, with critique of political powers or nations generally. The Romans, though at the top of the list, were by no means

4 Cf. *4 Ezra* 11.39; Kirschner 1985; J. J. Collins 1998 [1984], 194-232.

5 Trans. from Metzger in Charlesworth 1983. Cf. *2 Baruch* 36-40; *Sibylline Oracles* 5.398-413.

6 See Bauckham 1991, 86-90. Scholars usually link this oracle with particular anti-Roman campaigns or propaganda of the first century BCE, most notably that of Mithridates VI (early-1 BCE) or, if an Egyptian context is preferred, that of Cleopatra against Octavian (see Collins 1974, 57-64). J. J. Collins suggests that it should also be interpreted in light of the broader non-Judean tradition concerning world history as the conflict between East and West (see Lactantius, *Divine Institutions* 7.15.11; Collins 1974, 58-59).

7 Trans. by J. J. Collins in Charlesworth 1983.

8 Cf. *Sibylline Oracles* 4.145-50 (ca. 80 CE); 5.155-78 (ca. 80-131 CE); 8.68-130 (ca. 175 CE).

9 Cf. Momigliano 1987b; Goodman 1991, 222-24.

the only ruling power or nation railed against within Judean Sibylline oracles or apocalyptic literature of the Roman era. Secondly, these writings were quite frequently occasion-specific, reacting to specific circumstances or cataclysmic events and placing them within a broader cosmic or eschatological framework characterized by dualistic conflict, utilizing imagery and language from earlier Hebrew prophetic literature. Third, as Lester L. Grabbe and others caution, we should not so readily assume that an apocalyptic writing necessarily reflects an actual millennial movement.<sup>10</sup> The relationship between apocalyptic literature and social realities could be far more complex, as we shall also find with John's Apocalypse. Moreover, in light of the evidence which I am about to discuss, it would be better to view the anti-Roman rhetoric of this literature as representing one end of a range of perspectives. These perspectives may or may not have been replicated in the actual ongoing practices of some synagogues.

There is, however, other literary evidence concerning the actual activities of synagogues in the diaspora which provides helpful background to the situation in Roman Asia. Despite their apologetic purposes and somewhat philo-Roman tendencies, Josephus and Philo provide evidence of diaspora Judean attitudes and practices in the first century.<sup>11</sup> Both suggest that granting special honors to emperors and members of the imperial family was common among many Judean groups in the Roman empire, though this clearly and understandably stopped short of cultic honors or the dedication of images or statues, which would be considered idolatry or "fornication" by virtually all Judeans (cf. Wis 14).

So when Josephus responds to Apion of Alexandria's accusations concerning the failure of the Judeans to "erect statues (*imagines*) of the emperors," he points out that this stemmed not from intentions to foster sedition or to dishonor these figures, but from obedience to the Judean God's law forbidding the making of images of any kind.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Josephus suggests, Judeans did in fact grant other distinctive honors for emperors and members of the imperial family, among them the sacrifices performed in the temple at Jerusalem *on behalf of* the rulers (*Against Apion* 2.68-78; cf. *War* 2.195-98, 409-16).

In important respects we should not assume that the sociopolitical circumstances of Judeans in Alexandria or Egypt are representative of situations in areas like Asia Minor. Most notably the conflicts between Egyptians, Greeks, and Judeans that undergird the disturbances during and following the time of Gaius Caligula reflect a historical situation specific to Egypt. Alexandria was in certain respects a focal-point of anti-Judean feelings and actions, as well as anti-Roman sentiment, in a way that other regions were not.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, there are some ways in which Judean customs in Alexandria may reflect common diaspora practices. Most importantly here, in discussing the riots of 38 CE (in which the Judeans were attacked by others), Philo refers to the fact

10 Grabbe 1989. Cf. Davies 1989; J. J. Collins 1998 [1984], 12-14, 37-38, 280-81; Thompson 1990, 25-34.

11 On Philo's and Josephus' views of empire, see Barracrough 1984; Stern 1987; Goodman 1994.

12 Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 5.5: "Judean worship is vindicated by its antiquity, but their other customs are perverse and disgusting. . . . They do not believe in making images of God, because God cannot be represented in material form, and they do not even permit statues of any kind to stand in their cities, not statues of their kings or the emperors . . ." (trans. from Benko 1980, 1064).

13 Cf. Schäfer 1997; Barclay 1996, 72-81. On anti-Roman sentiment see the so-called "Acts of the Alexandrian (or Pagan) martyrs" (Musurillo 1954), which includes the "martyrdom" of Isodoros, one of those Alexandrian Greeks who was a key player in the anti-Judean riots under Gaius.

that it was common for synagogues to follow the convention of setting up honorary monuments for emperors. He mentions several different forms which the honors could take including “shields, golden crowns, plaques, and inscriptions” (*aspīdōn kai stephanōn epichrysōn kai stēlōn kai epigraphōn*), but *not* images (*Embassy to Gaius* 133).

Furthermore, before both the Alexandrian riots and Gaius’ attempt to set up his image in Jerusalem (ca. 40–41 CE), Judean groups of Alexandria had followed their usual custom in passing a decree granting honors (*timai*) to Gaius specifically, most likely in connection with his accession in 37 CE. Word of the Judeans’ decree, which was supposed to be delivered to the emperor by Flaccus, the Roman prefect, was suppressed (according to Philo) until the visit by king Agrippa I just before the riots. Agrippa praised the Judeans for their “piety toward the house of our benefactors” (*eusebein eis ton euergetēn oikon*) and promised to relay the message to Gaius (*Against Flaccus* 97–104).

Moreover, Philo contrasts the demonstrative Judean respect for imperial authorities to the dishonor shown by the Alexandrians involved in the riots. Ironically, he suggests, these Alexandrians (including associations under the patronage of Isodoros)<sup>14</sup> were dishonoring imperial figures by tearing down the Judeans’ monumental honors and, at the same time, falsely claiming to honor the emperor by setting up statues (*eikones*) of Gaius Caligula in the synagogues, thereby deeply offending Judeans and dishonoring their God (*Embassy to Gaius* 132–40; cf. *Against Flaccus* 51–52).<sup>15</sup> Philo imagines what rational Judeans might have said to their attackers:

You have failed to see that you are not adding to but taking from the honor given to our masters (*tois kyriois timēn*), and you do not understand that everywhere in the world the piety of the Judeans towards the Augustan household (*tēs eis ton Sebaston oikon hosiotētos*) clearly has its basis in the prayer-houses, and if these are destroyed no place, no method is left to us for paying this honor (*Against Flaccus* 49 [LCL, with adaptations]).

Due to the accidental nature of archaeological finds, we simply do not possess concrete examples of these Judean honorary monuments and dedications for the emperors from Roman Alexandria specifically. In fact, the surviving evidence for associations of any type at Alexandria is quite minimal, and there are no extant honorary monuments for emperors, even though it is likely that associations there, too, did honor emperors.<sup>16</sup> Epigraphic finds from elsewhere in Egypt do show that Judean prayer-houses, like the meeting-places of other associations, were frequently dedicated on behalf of current rulers in the Hellenistic era.<sup>17</sup> Philo’s comments confirm that similar monumental practices, comparable to those of associations we have discussed, continued under Roman rule as well. That Josephus’ and Philo’s statements regarding Judean practice in the diaspora

14 On the probable role of some associations in these incidents, see *Against Flaccus* 135–45 = *AGRW* L36 (cf. Bergmann and Hoffmann 1987, 27–31, who speak of them as “anti-Semitic clubs”).

15 On Judean conflicts with Gaius Caligula, see also Josephus, *War* 2.184–203; *Antiquities* 18.261–309; Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 184–338.

16 There was, however, an association at Alexandria called the “Augustan synod (*sebaste synodos*)” which was devoted to Caesar, son of god, Zeus Eleutherios (see Brashear 1993 [5 BCE]; cf. *BGU* IV 1137). On associations at Alexandria, do see *IAlexandriaK* 46, 65, 70, 90–101. Ethnic associations (beyond Judeans) are found elsewhere in Egypt, including a “corporate body” (*politeuma*) of Idumeans at Memphis, likely descendents of soldiers (112/111 BCE; *OGIS* 737; HONIGMAN 2003).

17 E.g. *IEgJud* 13 (37 BCE), 24 (140–116 BCE), 27–28 (II–I BCE), 125 (47–31 BCE).

are not merely apologetic or totally removed from reality within some circles we shall see presently with respect to the situation in Roman Asia.

### Judean Synagogues in Roman Asia

Earlier we found that granting special honors for the emperors or imperial officials in the form of inscriptions, dedications, or other monuments was common convention for associations in Roman Asia Minor. Such actions were one of the means by which a given group staked a claim, I argued, within society, making a statement regarding its place within the networks and hierarchies of the city, empire, and cosmos. This was the case despite the potential intermittent involvements of associations in civic disturbances or other areas of tension within society. There is further evidence that some groups of Judeans in this region, like associations, could take part in similar civic conventions associated with both the emperors and other imperial-connected figures. These links suggest that synagogues were in some ways participants within civic life and could be among those associations and communities that helped to cement relations between the Greek city and the empire.

With regard to honoring the emperors, a decree of Augustus preserved by Josephus will serve as a point of departure for our discussion of synagogues in the province of Asia. In keeping with Josephus' apologetic purposes, this decree confirms the rights of Judeans "to follow their own customs," including the transportation of sacred funds to Jerusalem and Sabbath observance (*Antiquities* 16.162–165 [ca. 12 BCE]; cf. Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 311–13). More importantly for our present purposes, Augustus happens to refer to an earlier "decree which was offered by [the Judeans of Asia] in my honor concerning the piety (*eusebeias*) which I show to all men, and on behalf of Gaius Marcius Censorinus" (16.165). Apparently one or more synagogues in Asia had followed common custom among communities and associations by passing an honorary decree for the emperor, as well as a Roman official. Word of the decree was subsequently forwarded to Augustus himself. According to Josephus' version, Augustus ordered that copies of both his own and the Judeans' honorary decree be placed in a prominent spot in the imperial cult temple of the provincial League of Asia (which was located at Pergamon).<sup>18</sup>

There are several points worth discussing in connection with this incident, each of which shed light on the nature of synagogues' potential involvements in civic conventions associated with the emperors. First, besides their act of honoring the emperor by way of a decree (probably setting up an inscription in a meeting-place), these Judeans in Asia involved themselves in common conventions of diplomacy by subsequently communicating word of the decree directly to Augustus. As we saw in the case of the Dionysiac initiates at Smyrna, who sent word of their celebrations at the birth of a son within the imperial family, associations could sometimes forward such honors directly to the recipients by way of an embassy or ambassador and could receive a letter or rescript in return (*ISmyrna* 600–601). Similarly, the hymn-singers of Pergamon had sent a copy of their honorary decree to emperor Claudius; only the opening of his positive letter of response survives

18 The reference to the assembly of Asia *en agyrē* is a corruption in the Greek text, but Scaliger's emendation, reading "in Ankyra" (*en Agkyrē*, which is followed by LCL), does not work historically. The Latin text of Josephus omits the phrase.



(*IEph* 3801.15-20). Sometimes a provincial governor or some other important ruling official who had direct contacts with the emperor could be asked to convey the message, as was the case when the Judeans of Alexandria decreed honors for Gaius.

Yet communicating honors was just one part of a larger set of diplomatic practices in which synagogues, like some other associations, could be involved. In some respects these groups were replicating the activities of civic and provincial communities. Fergus Millar's study of the *Emperor in the Roman World* (1977) clearly demonstrates the request-response character of Roman rule and the importance of such diplomatic ties in maintaining links between the central imperial power and communities and groups in the provinces. This interaction was part of the glue which held the empire together, and some associations did participate in it.

Quite often, links with an emperor or some other imperial official were a means of furthering the interests of the group in question, gaining favors or benefactions in return. For instance, the Demetriasts at Ephesos, like Judean groups in Asia, had on numerous occasions successfully gained special recognition of their ritual practices both from emperors and proconsuls, which they publicized in the form of a monument (*IEph* 213 = *AGRW* 163 [under Domitian]; see chapter 4). Such diplomatic activities were also central to the settlement of disputes and to judicial administration under Roman rule. The Dionysiac devotees at Kyme who sent an ambassador to the Roman proconsul did so in the hopes of gaining a favorable decision in a case regarding the re-acquisition of the temple where they had met, and they were successful (*IKyme* 17 [under Augustus and Agrippa]).

It is within this realm of diplomatic practices among communities and associations under Roman rule, I would suggest, that we can partially understand the activities of Judean groups in Asia and the favorable decisions they sometimes gained as a result, some of which Josephus records (in *Antiquities*).<sup>19</sup> Josephus records several occasions when Roman authorities (emperors, consuls, proconsuls, and others) granted Judean groups in cities such as Ephesos, Sardis, and Miletos certain privileges, including exemption from military service, freedom to practice native customs, and freedom to transport the temple-tax to Jerusalem. And so, according to one document, when the proconsul Jullus Antonius was at Ephesos (ca. 9-6 BCE), an embassy of Judeans requested that he re-acknowledge the earlier privileges of Augustus and Agrippa that permitted them to deliver the temple-tax and "to live and act in accordance with their ancestral customs without interference" (*Antiquities* 16.172-73). Josephus explicitly states his apologetic purposes in presenting such documents: to show the Romans' benefactions to the Judeans in the hopes that the Greek inhabitants would follow suit in not hindering the Judeans from following their customs (*Antiquities* 14.186-89, 265-67; 16.174-78). Josephus includes some examples when cities did indeed follow this pattern (e.g. *Antiquities* 14.156-61, involving Halikarnassos and Sardis). In

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19 *Antiquities* 16.185-267 (time of Julius Caesar, ca. 49-43 BCE), 16.160-78 (time of Augustus and Agrippa), and 14.301-23. There are three kinds of materials preserved by Josephus: decrees of the senate or emperors, decrees of cities, and rescripts replying to letters directed to provincial governors. Critical study of the documents suggests that although they are presented in an apologetic context (i.e. they are selective) and there are problems with specific documents as they stand (especially with respect to the names of officials), generally they are not forgeries and often they do indeed reflect actual historical incidents and relations (see Rajak 1984; Barclay 1996, 262-64). For a less accepting view of the documents, see Moehring 1975.

keeping with his apologetic purposes, though, Josephus tends towards generalizing or universalizing what were originally more modest or limited actions and statements.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to the perspective presented here, a traditional scholarly approach to these documents in Josephus and to Roman “policy” concerning diaspora Judeans generally has been dominated by a legalistic focus. Jean Juster’s discussion of the documents as juridical sources, depicting the actions of Roman authorities as a series of legal proclamations along the lines of a “Judean Magna Carta,” reflects common approaches among other scholars.<sup>21</sup> And so E. Mary Smallwood (1976, 128) speaks of the actions of Roman authorities after Julius Caesar as “comprehensive permanent legislation giving positive rights to legalize the practice of Judaism in all its aspects.” This was a “charter of Judean rights,” then, which made Judaism a “legal religion” (*religio licita*), unlike the many other supposedly illicit groups or associations throughout the empire. Like those scholars who look at the occasional interventions of authorities in the life of associations and interpret them in terms of the establishment and enforcement of permanent legislation, these scholars have taken a similar approach to Roman-Judean relations in the diaspora. The Judean Magna Carta theory also depends, in part, on another assumption within scholarship that needs considerable qualification: the notion that Judeans *needed* special legal protection because the relationship between synagogues and their cities of residence was by nature conflictual in an ongoing and consistent manner, something I have begun to heavily qualify in this study.

As Tessa Rajak and others argue, the traditional approach to Roman “policy” regarding diaspora Judeans is inadequate.<sup>22</sup> The privileges found in the decrees which Josephus records do not represent some sort of legally defined Magna Carta protecting the Judeans, nor are they an acknowledgement of “Judaism’s” official status as a legally recognized religion (*religio licita*). Rather, these were ad hoc responses to requests or complaints which were standard procedure under Roman rule. In fact, as Millar (1973, 145) points out, the notion that “each cult in the Empire was either a *religio licita* or a *religio illicita*” is not supported by any ancient source. The benefits granted were part of the exchanges involved in conventions of friendship and patronage, part of the benefactor-beneficiary relationships in which other associations from Asia Minor were also participants. As such, they were, in Rajak’s (1984, 116) words, “things of the moment” with an impermanence which required the continued activity of Judean groups in re-gaining from Roman authorities confirmation of earlier acknowledgements and benefits. It is worthy noting that a similar picture concerning Roman “policy” on diaspora Judeans emerges from Leonard Victor Rutgers’s study of expulsions of Judeans from Rome. Rutgers argues that the Romans were neither tolerant, nor intolerant towards Judeans in the diaspora. Rather, in keeping with the nature of Roman rule, “Rome’s ‘Judean policy’ remained in essence a collection of ad hoc measures with often limited effectiveness in both space and time” (Rutgers 1998, 114). Such measures were more often than not simply a by-product of Roman administrative approaches concerning the maintenance of order or involvement in the conventions of diplomacy.

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20 Cf. Barclay 1996, 262–63.

21 Juster 1914, 1.217, 132–58. Cf. Rabello 1980.

22 Rajak 1984. Cf. Trebilco 1991, 8–12.

The benefits or acknowledgements gained by the Judean groups, then, were not totally exceptional. Rather, they were part of the common processes by which groups and communities gained such favors. This should caution us in arguing that these benefits or favors were a “deeply resented” focal point of conflicts with other inhabitants in the cities. Christopher D. Stanley (1996), for example, imagines that, even by the time of Julius Caesar, anti-Roman hostility was widespread in the cities of Asia Minor. Relying on assumptions I have challenged in part two, Stanley (1996, 120) asserts that inhabitants resented the interference of Roman authorities in their civic affairs, and private “clubs and associations became the forum of choice for anti-aristocratic and anti-Roman sentiment in the cities.” While these associations were strictly controlled or disallowed by the authorities, the Judean groups, in contrast, were granted special privileges (cf. Feldman 1993, 93–94). He then argues that “the very legal protections that the Judeans had earlier received from the Romans set them apart from other immigrant groups as a focal point for anti-Roman hostility” (Stanley 1996, 122–23). In other words, Stanley seems to think that the Romans’ diplomatic ties with, or benefits offered to, Judean groups (in the form of acknowledgement of their rights to perform their own customs) were utterly different than those pertaining to other groups or associations, which is not the case.

Returning to the honorary decree for Augustus by the Judeans in Asia (recorded in Josephus), a second noteworthy point concerns the placement of the monument. The Judeans gained something other than just recognition of their honors for the emperor and the right to perform their customs in honor of their God from this action. If we can understand monumentalizing as, in part, an expression of a group’s place within society, as I have argued, then this particularly public placement of the Judeans honorary decree within the imperial cult temple of Asia is significant. This tells us something about how the Judean groups in question might have been perceived by those who frequented the temple and about the feelings of prestige and importance that the Judeans would have felt as a result. Certainly the Judeans’ honorary decree for an emperor and imperial official could be interpreted by those who saw it as an indication that synagogues, like other associations, were participants within customary civic and imperial practices. They, like others such as the hymn-singers at Pergamon (*IEph 3801* = *AGRW* 160, part 2), had granted appropriate honors to very important benefactors of the provincial communities and this was recognized within a provincial institution. In this sense, the Judeans could be viewed as participants in maintaining the connections between Rome and the province which ensured the well-being and prosperity of the civic communities of western Asia Minor.

There would be prestige for the Judeans associated with this placement of a monument in such an important location, then, but there is another side to this that pertains to the competitive cultural framework. Other communities, groups, and associations would certainly seek to gain imperial recognition of their practices and to have their monuments set up in such a desirable location, but not all could hope to achieve this. In some respects, synagogues could be competitors alongside other associations for visibility or prestige not only at the local civic level but also within the broader provincial setting. Presumably, there were times when this competitive element could be a source of tensions with other communities or groups.

Before going on to discuss Judean connections with other Roman functionaries, like

Censorinus, it is important to note that the honors granted to emperors specifically find parallels among other Judean groups as well. Like their counterparts in Asia and in Alexandria, it seems that some synagogues at Rome and Ostia visibly demonstrated their respect for imperial authorities and emperors. One synagogue at Rome called itself the “Augustesians” in honor of their patron, and another named itself the “Agrippesians” (after Marcus Agrippa), reminiscent of the “friends-of-Agrippa” association that existed at Smyrna and a similar association at Sparta.<sup>23</sup> An inscription from the synagogue at Ostia (a port city of Rome) involves a benefactor, Mindius Faustus, dedicating a structure and a Torah “ark” for the group. What is especially noteworthy here is the use of a customary Latin invocation: *pro salute Augusti*, “For the well-being of the emperor” (*IEurJud* I 13; probably II CE). L. Michael White (1998, 57) aptly states that imperial ties such as these “would inevitably link Judean residents of Rome or Ostia directly to the non-Judean population in important social and economic ways.” The formula, which would not traditionally be expected in connection with Judeans, is used in a similar way in building dedications by Mithraic associations at both Ostia and Rome (*CIMRM* 273, 510).

We have already encountered considerable evidence that associations of various kinds could proclaim honors for, and maintain positive links with, influential figures besides the emperors themselves, including Roman provincial officials of senatorial or equestrian rank. Returning to the Asian Judeans’ honorary decree, the second honoree, C. Marcius Censorinus, was an important imperial official of the senatorial order with considerable experience in the Greek East.<sup>24</sup> Among his services in Asia Minor, Censorinus was a legate of Augustus at Sinope in Bithynia-Pontus, probably in the wake of a Bosphoran rebellion around 13–12 BCE (Bowersock 1964, 208–209). Several years after attaining the consulate at Rome in 8 BCE, he became proconsul of the province of Asia, perhaps in 2 or 3 CE, and shortly thereafter he died (Velleius Paterculus, *Roman Histories* 2.102.1). Censorinus’ popularity among other inhabitants of Asia Minor, besides the Judeans, is suggested both by a Pergamene honorary decree for him and by the cult (including games) established in honor of this “savior and benefactor” at Mylasa, which happens to represent the latest evidence we have from the Greek East concerning cults for Roman governors (*IPergamon* 422).<sup>25</sup> Like other associations that maintained such positive contacts with provincial officials, the Judean groups’ early ties with Censorinus (probably beginning around or before 12 BCE) could in subsequent years be translated into other favors or benefactions.

Although we happen to lack further concrete examples of honorary monuments set up by Judean gatherings for provincial functionaries in the province of Asia specifically, we do encounter similar evidence elsewhere, as at Berenike in Cyrenaica (north-central Africa).<sup>26</sup> Three inscriptions have been found relating to Judean groups at this location, each of them suggesting some degree of integration of the Judeans with their Greek neighbors, as Joyce Reynolds also points out.<sup>27</sup> The inscription which interests us most here concerns a monument erected by a Judean community

23 *CIJ* 365, 425, 503, 284, 301, 338, 368, 416, 496. Cf. Richardson 1998; Leon 1995 [1960], 140–42. Cf. *ISmyrna* 331; *IG VI* 374 (Sparta).

24 See *PIR*<sup>1</sup> M 163; Bowersock 1964, 1965, 18–19; Sherk 1980, 1036–37; *IPergamon* 292; *IMilet* 255.

25 *SEG* 2 (1924), no. 549; Sahin and Engelmann 1979; cf. Bowersock 1965, 150–51; Price 1984, 42–43, 46–47.

26 On Judaism in Cyrenaica, see Applebaum 1979; Barclay 1996, 231–42; Josephus, *War* 7.437–53.

27 Reynolds 1977, 242–47, nos. 16 (55 CE), 17 (ca. 24 CE), 18 (ca. 9–6 BCE) = *CJZC* 70–72.

(probably around 24 CE) in honor of a Roman provincial official named Marcus Tittius, son of Sextus, of the Aemilia tribe (*CJZC* 71 = *AGRW* 306).<sup>28</sup> This gathering of Judeans, like other associations we have encountered, called itself a “corporate body” (*politeuma*), and was led by several leaders called “archons” (a term also used of leaders of the *polis*), one of whom possessed Roman citizenship.<sup>29</sup> The inscription reads as follows:

In the fifty-fifth year, on the twenty-fifth of Phaoph, at the assembly of the feast of Tabernacles, during the leaderships (archonships) of Kleandros son of Stratonikos, Euphranor son of Ariston, Sosigenes son of Sosippos, Andromachos son of Andromachos, Marcus Laeilius Onasion son of Apollonios, Philonides son of Hagemon, Autokles son of Zenon, Sonikos son of Theodotos, and Josepos son of Straton:

Whereas Marcus Tittius son of Sextus, member of the Aemilia tribe, an excellent man has, since he arrived in the province over public affairs, performed his governorship over these affairs in a good and humane manner and has always displayed a calm disposition in his behavior. He has shown himself to be non-burdensome not only in these affairs but also with the citizens who meet with him individually. Furthermore, in performing his governorship in a useful way for the Judeans of our corporate body (*politeuma*), both individually and as a group, he never fails to live up to his own noble rank.

For these reasons, the leaders (archons) and the corporate body of Judeans in Berenike decided to praise him, to crown him by name at each gathering and new-moon with a crown of olive branches and ribbon, and to have the leaders engrave the decree on a monument of Parian stone which is to be set up in the most prominent place in the amphitheater. All pebbles white (i.e. unanimous positive results of the vote).

The language of the inscription is most compatible with the suggestion that Tittius was proconsul of Cyrenaica and Crete, but the provincial positions of quaestor or proconsular legate are not out of the question.<sup>30</sup> So Tittius was probably of the senatorial order but possibly an equestrian. If the name is misspelled here with an extra “t,” and the honorand is in fact a son or grandson of Sextus Titius, a quaestor to Antony in 43 BCE, then it is even more likely that Marcus would have reached the senatorial order by this generation.<sup>31</sup>

The Judean association’s decree, which was passed during its celebration of the Feast of

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28 Roux and Roux 1949 = *IGR* I 1024. If the date stated in the inscription is calculated based on the Cyrenaican era (rather than the Actian era) then this would be 41 BCE. The significance of the inscription for our present purposes does not fully depend upon dating; nonetheless, the presence of a Roman citizen within the Judean group at the time of this inscription suggests that 24 CE should be preferred. Martha W. Baldwin Bowsky (1987, 504–505) suggests a date of 14/13 BCE partially based on issues pertaining to the reference to the Feast of Tabernacles. This remains uncertain, however.

29 On *politeuma* as a general term referring to an unofficial “association,” see Zuckerman 1985 (*contra* A. Kasher) and Lüderitz 1994. Now also see Cowey and Maresch 2001 and Honigman 2003.

30 Hugh J. Mason (1974, 81) argues that *prostasia* in this inscription is the equivalent of the Latin *praesidatus provinciae*, and he interprets this as a reference to the proconsul. The term *eparcheia*, translated by Lüderitz with the more general term “prefecture,” is frequently used as a technical equivalent for the Latin *provincia*, which is how Roux and Roux (1949, 284) translate it (see Mason 1974, 45, 135–36). For the other options, see Reynolds 1977, 245 and Bowsky 1987, 498–501.

31 Cf. Münzer 1937.

Tabernacles, is saturated with the conventional honorary language of benefaction. It also shows the group's common concern for the well-being of the civic community at large. They praise Tittius as an excellent man and administrator who had exercised his governorship over the province's public affairs in a humane manner, benefiting the Judeans, both as a group and as individuals, but also other citizens of Berenike. In response to his beneficent behavior, the leaders and members of the Judean association voted that he be commended and granted an honorary crown at each monthly gathering of the group.

Furthermore, the decree was to be inscribed on a plaque and set up in a prominent spot within the amphitheater (*amphitheatron*). Several years earlier (ca. 8–6 BCE) the same Judean group had placed another monument in the “amphitheater,” honoring the Roman citizen D. Valerius Dionysios (likely a member) for plastering and painting the structure or a room therein (*CJZC* 70 = *AGRW* 305).<sup>32</sup> Regardless of where the monuments were erected—in the Judeans' meeting-place or in the civic amphitheater—here we have a Judean group clearly participating in common conventions of honors in return for benefactions, maintaining links with a provincial official, most likely a proconsul.

There has been some debate as to whether “amphitheater” is a non-technical designation of the Judean group's meeting-place or if it is in fact a reference to an actual civic structure. Those who argue against the possibility of it being a civic structure, such as Gert Lüderitz (1994, 213), base their assessment on the unlikelihood that the floors of a civic amphitheater would have been plastered, and that it would be “improbable that the Judean *politeuma* had a right to put up inscriptions in a public place.” Shimon Applebaum (1979, 165) questions the possibility that a Judean group would have frequented such a building, also expressing an important assumption behind the view: “it is hardly to be imagined that the community (however assimilated to Greek habits) would have met to pray in a building contaminated by gentile idolatry.”

There is much evidence, however, to challenge the views of Lüderitz and Applebaum as the following discussion will indicate. Monumentalizing, in fact, did not make much sense unless at least some degree of public visibility was expected, and associations would naturally seek, though not always receive, permission to set up a monument in or near more significant civic or provincial structures. Furthermore, as the evidence for Judeans in the theater at Miletos and in the bath-gymnasium complex at Sardis suggests, it would not be odd to imagine the Judeans of Berenike at least seeking a place in some sense within a sociocultural institution of a Greco-Roman city (such as the amphitheater), possibly even attending as a group. Both monuments in the amphitheater, although set up by the Judean association, also make very clear references to the civic inhabitants of Berenike as mutual beneficiaries of Dionysios' and Tittius' actions. Like Reynolds, I believe we should be more inclined to the view that this structure is in fact what its name suggests: a civic amphitheater.<sup>33</sup> If so, this makes quite a statement regarding the integration of this Judean group within local society. The monument clearly communicated the Judeans' contribution to the life of the city, indicating the group's important role in maintaining fitting relations within the webs of

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32 The suggestion that Dionysios is a member is based on the fact that the *politeuma* of Judeans releases this benefactor from liturgies, presumably those within the group since the *politeuma* would not be in a position to release him from civic liturgies (Reynolds 1977, 247).

33 Reynolds 1977, 247. Cf. Zuckerman 1985, 179; *NewDocs* IV 111)

power which ensured the well-being of civic communities under Roman rule. Such participation in social networks is further confirmed on a more local basis within Asia Minor specifically.

When we looked at the evidence for associations, we found that contacts with imperial-connected individuals were certainly not limited to contacts with emperors or provincial officials like Censorinus or Tittius, but also involved links with other temple functionaries and civic officials. At Akmoneia, for instance, the guild of clothing-cleaners honored T. Flavius Montanus, a local aristocrat who had assumed the high-priesthood at the Ephesian temple for the imperial gods for a time (*IGR IV 643* = *AGRW 146*). Such elite families were an important link between the Greek city and both province and empire. Solicitation and offer of support from a patron did not necessarily mean that she or he was a member or adherent of the cult or group supported. “In parts of Phrygia, Judaism had a high religious profile, and we need not be surprised to see this echoed in social contacts and mutual esteem.”<sup>34</sup> The case of Julia Severa at Akmoneia is illustrative.

Julia Severa was a member of a prominent family descending from Galatian royalty, which came to play a key role within the webs of imperial power in Asia Minor, as we found in an earlier chapter. Together with her Italian husband, L. Serenius Capito, she had a son, L. Serenius Cornutus, who became a senator under Nero, assuming positions including quaestor in the province of Cyprus and legate of the proconsul of Asia around 73–77 CE. Two of her kinsmen (perhaps second or third cousins), C. A. A. Julius Quadratus of Pergamon and C. Julius Severus of Ankyra, were members of the consular order who also assumed the office of proconsul of Asia at one point in their careers (109–110 CE and 152–53 CE respectively).<sup>35</sup>

Julia Severa herself was a noteworthy benefactor and civic notable within Akmoneia in the decades of the mid- to late-first century, but she was not a Judean, as some had suggested.<sup>36</sup> On one occasion, the local elders’ organization (*gerousia*) honored her with a monument, also mentioning her role as high-priestess and director of games for the civic cult devoted to the Augustan (*Sebastoi*) gods (*MAMA VI 263*; cf. *MAMA VI 153\** = *IGR IV 656*; Ramsay 1895, 649). An inscription from the late-first or early-second century (which represents our earliest epigraphic attestation of a synagogue in the province of Asia) reveals that the Judeans of Akmoneia also apparently had ties with this influential woman who was an imperial cult high-priestess at one point:

The building (or: house; *oikos*), which was built by Julia Severa, was renovated by P. Tyrronius Klados, head of the synagogue for life, Lucius son of Lucius, also head of the synagogue, and Publius Zotikos, leader (*archōn*), from their own resources and from the common deposit. They decorated the walls and ceiling, made the windows secure, and took care of all the rest of the decoration. The synagogue honored them with a gold shield because of their virtuous disposition, goodwill, and diligence in relation to the synagogue (*IJO II 168* = *MAMA VI 264* = *AGRW 145*; see figure 48).

Severa had apparently shown her beneficence by contributing the building in which the Judean group met sometime around the period 60–80 CE (cf. Luke 7:1–5, regarding the story of a Roman

34 Rajak and Noy 1993, 88. Cf. Trebilco 1991.

35 Halfmann 1979, no. 5 (Cornutus); *PIR*<sup>2</sup> I 507; Halfmann 1979, no. 17; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> I 573 (Quadratus); Halfmann 1979, no. 62 (Severus).

36 E.g. Ramsay 1895, 639, 650–51, 673. See Trebilco 1991, 57–60.



centurion who built a synagogue for the Judeans at Capernaum). Along with others who later renovated the building, Severa was honored by the synagogue with a golden shield and this monument. This positive connection with a high-priestess is not the only sign of linkages with the local elites in this inscription. It seems likely that P. Tyrronius Klados, the head of the synagogue, was associated with the Tyrronius family as a relative, freedman, or client, and the suggestion that he, too, is not even Judean is within the realm of possibility in light of typical values and practices among associations.<sup>37</sup> Members of the Tyrronius family held important civic positions at Akmoneia; C. Tyrronius Rapon served alongside Severa at one point, most likely as civic high-priest (*MAMA* VI 265 = *IGR* IV 654; ca. 70–80 CE). Like other associations, Judean groups could be among the competitors for benefactions from influential figures within the civic and provincial context.



Figure 48: Honorary monument erected by the Judeans at Akmoneia for Julia Severa and others (*MAMA* VI 264).

37 On the Tyrronius connection, see White 1997, 309–10 n.48. The title attributed to Klados and Lucius may be honorary rather than functional if the recent study by Rajak and Noy (1993, 88–89) is correct: “It is conceivable. . . that you did not have to be Judean to be an *archisynagagos*.”

## Congregations of Jesus-followers in Roman Asia Minor

Unfortunately, unlike synagogues for whom we have some epigraphic remains, concrete material evidence for groups of Jesus-followers in Roman Asia is wanting concerning our period of focus (up to the time of Antoninus Pius). In fact, material remains identifiable as Christian (including grave-inscriptions) do not even come into the picture until the mid- to late-second century. The lack of surviving archaeological evidence concerning Christian participation in imperial facets of civic life specifically is relatively unsurprising in light of the generally partial nature of survival and discovery, as well as the limitations of archaeological digs in some areas of Asia Minor. Added to this is the fact that Christians were such a numerically insignificant portion of the population in our period of focus (cf. Hopkins 1998; Snyder 2003 [1985]). The case of Judeans at Alexandria in the first century (considered a central locus of the Judean diaspora population) is illustrative of the vagaries of archaeological remains: although we know that Judean groups there did conventionally erect honorary inscriptions and monuments for imperial figures (from Philo), *none* have in fact survived (see *IAlexandriaK* for inscriptions from the area). So the absence of inscriptions relating to early Christians comes as no surprise, and the silence of material evidence should *not* be assumed to mean that Christians did not engage in such honorary practices within local settings, particularly since we do have literary evidence in this regard.

Even when we turn to literary evidence of Christianity in Asia, it is unfortunate that some authors simply did not have occasion to refer to the emperors or to common Christian attitudes and practices in regard to imperial facets of civic life. For example, there are no clear references to such things in Ephesians, Colossians, the epistles of John, and (in spite of attempts to read anti-imperial attitudes into them) the epistles of Ignatius. The Johannine epistles are primarily concerned with internal issues and problems in the house-churches. References to “rulers,” “powers” and “authorities” in both Ephesians and Colossians seem to relate to angelic or cosmic beings (e.g. Eph 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:10, 15). Ignatius complains of mistreatment by the soldiers (“leopards”) who escort him to Rome (*Romans* 5.1), alludes to the “visible and invisible” “rulers” who will also be subject to judgement (*Smyrnians* 6.1), and speaks of the two coinages of God and of “the world” (*Magnesians* 5.2). However, scholars such as William R. Schoedel and Allen Brent stretch things too far in reading into Ignatius (and the Asian churches) strong anti-Roman attitudes or references to imperial cults. Schoedel wrongly imagines that the Asian cities “felt alienated from the mainstream of Roman society,” being a haven for anti-imperial attitudes, and that this also worked itself out in the churches.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, Schoedel and Brent are not alone in their imposition of anti-imperial perspectives onto early Christian literature, and I will return to this in the discussion of Richard A. Horsley and those with him further below.

Despite the shortcomings of our materials, there is important and neglected literary evidence that congregations of Christ-devotees in Asia Minor could in significant ways also participate in certain imperial practices. This provides us with clear signs of positive interaction within civic life. Some Christian groups did so in a manner comparable to the involvements of other associations and synagogues. This participation was one of the means by which congregations, like both

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38 Schoedel 1980, 53–4. Cf. Schoedel 1985, 14–15; Brent 1998.

associations and synagogues, could find a place for themselves within the sociocultural framework of the Greek city and empire, despite distinctive identities and some areas of tension. Yet, as with many synagogues or individual Judeans, involvements stopped short of honoring imperial figures as gods specifically. It seems that the distinction between cultic (“religious”) and non-cultic forms of honors for the emperors was an important one within many Judean and Christian circles, even though the distinction could be blurry or indistinguishable for some other inhabitants in the cities of Asia Minor. Yet not all Judeans or Christians would necessarily consider the same activities within their definition of active participation in cultic honors or “idolatry,” as we will see when we turn to the Apocalypse and its opponents. So there was ambiguity and variety in what Judeans and Christians considered acceptable practice in relation to this and other dimensions of life in the civic community.

In contrast to the perspective of the Apocalypse, many Christian leaders in Asia Minor, including the author of the Pastorals, the author of 1 Peter, Polycarp, and Melito held a relatively positive view of empire in some respects and, on occasion, encouraged their followers to adopt the common conventions of praying for and/or honoring civic or imperial authorities and emperors. A brief discussion of Melito (bishop of Sardis) and Polycarp (bishop of Smyrna) will set the stage for a discussion of 1 Peter and the Pastorals.

Although not dealing with actual Christian practice per se, Melito of Sardis’ positive view of empire and Christianity’s place within it reflects a particular trajectory of Christianity in Asia Minor. In writing his apology to Marcus Aurelius (161–180 CE), Melito states the following with some hyperbole:

[Christianity’s] full flower came among your nation in the great reign of your ancestor Augustus, and became an omen of good to your empire, for from that time the power of the Romans became great and splendid. You are now his happy successor. . . . Your ancestors nourished it together with the other cults, and the greatest proof that our doctrine flourished for good along with the empire in its noble beginning is the fact that it met no evil in the reign of Augustus, but on the contrary everything splendid and glorious according to the wishes of everyone. The only emperors who were ever persuaded by malicious men to slander our teaching were Nero and Domitian, and from them arose the lie, and the unreasonable custom of falsely accusing Christians (Melito in Eusebius, *H.E.* 4.26.7–9 [trans. LCL]).

Speaking against a recent incident of mistreatment of Christians in Asia, Melito evidently believes that empire and Christianity are not incompatible and he even suggests that the success of empire is dependent upon Christianity. Such views could work themselves out in the actual practices of congregations in Asia.

When faced with martyrdom, Polycarp of Smyrna, for instance, makes reference to the common Christian teaching “to render honor (*timēn*), as is fitting, if it does not hurt us, to princes and authorities appointed by God” (*Mart.Pol.* 10.2 [LCL, with adaptations]). He also exhorts the Christians at Philippi to pray for the emperors and other authorities (*Phil.* 12.3). This trajectory of Christianity is also clearly evident in writings from an earlier era.

Moreover, as the following discussion of the Pastoral epistles and 1 Peter illustrates, for many

congregations in Asia (around the end of the first century) participation in at least some imperial-related activities was considered normal. In this respect, there are important analogies between congregations and other associations in the same civic settings.

Scholars are in general agreement that the Pastoral epistles (1-2 Timothy and Titus) represent one important strand of Christianity in western Asia Minor, likely centred at Ephesos, in the late-first or early-second century. Among the principal aims of these letters, written in Paul's name, are concern for "sound teaching" over against "godless and silly myths" and the proper management of both Christian households and the Christian assembly, the "household of God" (1 Tim 3:15). In the process, the attitudes, values, and practices advocated by the Pastorals reflect considerable cross-overs with Greco-Roman values and conceptions of good citizenship, as scholars since Dibelius (1931) suggest. Furthermore, as in 1 Peter, there is a clear concern with the appearance of assemblies of Jesus-followers in the eyes of other civic inhabitants. So the Pastorals are, in some respects, an attempt to find a place for these assemblies within society.

Within this framework, positive viewpoints and practices pertaining to Roman emperors and other authorities play a significant role in the Pastorals' vision of group-life and the relation of these assemblies to surrounding society. The evidence we have discussed with regard to imperial-related practices of associations, both internal and external, provides a context for this. The author of 1 Timothy gives a prominent position to the following exhortation: "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all people, for emperors and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way" (1 Tim 2:1-2). Again, in the letter to Titus we find a less specific admonition for leaders to remind Christians "to be submissive to rulers and authorities," along with other guidelines as to fitting behavior in relation to others (Titus 3:1-2).

Although these passages reflect traditional material common within the Greco-Roman world and present within Paul's letters themselves (Rom 13:1-7), they nonetheless show this author's concern for and knowledge of actual practices within the Christian assemblies in the cities of Asia. They suggest that emperors and other authorities were singled out as deserving of special respect, and that this was expressed within the ongoing ritual life of the group, in this case within prayers. Tertullian also makes reference to this common practice of "praying for the emperors, and for the whole estate of the empire and the interests of Rome" (*Apology* 32.1; cf. 30.4-5). The letter of the Roman Christians to the Corinthians (ca. 90 CE) provides an example of just how such a prayer might go, calling for obedience "to rulers and governors" who are put in a position of power by God and asking for the "health, peace, and concord" of the empire (1 *Clement* 60.4-61.3). As in 1 Peter, the Pastoral epistles' reference to actual concrete behaviors on the part of Christians with regard to imperial or other figures of authority is closely linked with how the author imagines Jesus-followers will "lead a quiet and peaceable life" within the *polis*.

We do indeed find such prayers and rituals as common practices within the cities of Asia and elsewhere, sometimes in connection with other associations.<sup>39</sup> So, for instance, a man from

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39 See, for example, the sacred law regarding a festival associated with Demeter and the civic presidents' meeting-place at Ephesos, which included a prescription "to pray on behalf of the sacred senate and the people of Rome and the people of Ephesos" (*IEph* 10.15-17 = *NewDocs* IV 25 [in the text of the notes]; III CE). Pliny the Younger refers to prayers for the emperors or empire in his letters about cities of Bithynia and Pontus (Pliny, *Epistles* 10.13, 100).

Philadelphia thanks the “great and holy god Sabathikos” for answering his earlier prayer for Roman citizenship; he then prays for the continued increase of both the imperial Julian household and the association (*oikos*) of which he was evidently a member (*TAM V 225* = *ILydiaKP II 224*; late I BCE–early I CE). A passage in Apuleius of Madaura’s novel actually provides us with a glimpse of just such a group ritual performed at a gathering of Isis-initiates (set in Cenchreae, Greece): “[a cultic functionary] went up into a high pulpit and read out of a book blessings upon ‘the mighty emperor, upon the senate, upon the equestrian order, and upon the whole people of Rome, and upon all sailors and all ships who owe obedience to our empire’” (*Metamorphoses* 11.17; trans. by Graves 1990, with adaptations). The fact that the Christian assemblies addressed by the Pastorals could share such practices in common with other associations also suggests at least some similarities in world views. The emperors and imperial officials were very important and powerful figures within the cosmic order of things, deserving of distinctive attention and positive expressions of good will within the internal activities of the group.

Before going on to the evidence of 1 Peter, a few words are in order about what is often considered an alternative trajectory of Christianity in Asia Minor to be contrasted to that of the Pastorals specifically. In certain respects, the views preserved within the second-century apocryphal *Acts of Paul* reflect alternative perspectives and practices concerning various aspects of society, especially marriage and the household, but also imperial dimensions of society. To some extent, these counter-cultural traditions also found social expression in the so-called Phrygian (or Montanist) movement of the mid-late second century, at least with regard to womens’ leadership.<sup>40</sup> However, Dennis Ronald MacDonald (1983, 66, 40–42) overstates the contrast with the Pastorals in proposing that the *Acts of Paul* “bristles with anti-Roman hostility” and exudes the conflict between the cult of Christ and that of Caesar. MacDonald is not alone in this tendency to read into Christian sources references to imperial cults, or to exaggerate anti-Roman sentiments. In a study of Ignatius and the imperial cult (1998, 31), Allen Brent claims that Ignatius directly “confronts Roman power” and that Ignatius’ procession to martyrdom is “set over against [imperial cult].” No evidence of this is provided. Brent’s ability to find imperial cult where it is not expressly evident is based on a method which *assumes* anti-imperialism as the norm and then takes Ignatius’ language and looks for parallels in the imperial cult specifically, rather than within Greco-Roman cultural life more generally. A similar, problematic approach that projects (legitimate) modern concerns to critique imperialism onto ancient evidence is taken by Richard A. Horsley (1997, 242), who manages to find in 1 Corinthians “Paul’s adamant opposition to Roman imperial society.” Horsley feels he can characterize Christianity more broadly as an “anti-imperial movement.” Paul preached an “anti-imperial gospel” and “much of his key language would have evoked echoes of the imperial cult and ideology” (Horsley 1997, 140). Some exegetical acrobatics are then necessary to interpret Romans 13. Unfortunately, many publications in more recent years by Horsley and those who work with him on anti-imperialism continue with this problematic method which *assumes* anti-imperialism, *imagines* “hidden codes,” and feels no need to have actual evidence to support such claims.<sup>41</sup> The problem is that this is presented as history-writing rather than politically- or

40 Cf. Trevett 1996.

41 Compare also Bruce W. Winter’s (1994, 123–43) unconvincing attempt to find imperial cults in the epistle to the Galatians.

theologically-oriented musings aimed at supporting what might in other respects be valuable attempts to critique modern imperialisms.

Returning to the *Acts of Paul*, imperial cults specifically do not expressly play a role in any of its stories and, if the Armenian version of Thecla's removal of Alexander's crown (which refers to a "figure of Caesar") is taken as secondary, there are no references to these cults *at all*.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, as in the Acts of the Apostles, the portrayal of other imperial authorities in the *Acts of Paul* is neutral or relatively positive, even in the story of Paul's martyrdom. For instance, the author has the Roman proconsul, Castellius, gladly listen to Paul's speech "about the holy works of Christ" (3.20), and this official weeps and admires Thecla's power when faced with death (3.22), ultimately releasing her (3.38). Despite Nero's harsh actions against the Christians, Longus the prefect and Cestus the centurion, along with other members of Nero's household, become converts to Christianity (11.1-7).

It is in this same martyrdom story, though, that traditions reflecting tensions between Christianity and the imperial power in connection with emperor Nero come to the fore. Along with others from the imperial household who came to hear Paul speaking in a rented barn outside of Rome was Nero's cup-bearer, Patroclus, who (in a Eutychos-like manner) had fallen from a window, died and subsequently been raised (*Acts of Paul* 11.1; cf. Acts 20:9). When asked by Nero who made him alive, Patroclus answers that it was "Christ Jesus, king of the ages" who, it is added, "destroys all kingdoms under heaven" and for whom Patroclus was a "soldier".<sup>43</sup> Indignant at the existence of this alternative army of Christ, Nero issues his "edict that all Christians and soldiers of Christ that were found should be executed" (11.2-3). It is only later in the story that Paul's anti-imperial speech before Nero is softened somewhat when he states that the Christian "soldiers" "fight not, as you suppose, for a king who is from the earth but for one who is from heaven" (11.4).<sup>44</sup> Although the apparent link with Nero's infamous slaughter of Christians following the fire at Rome should caution us in assuming that this story is a general statement regarding perceptions of, or practices in relation to, all emperors or imperial power, it does contain anti-imperial attitudes that can be contrasted to those advocated by the Pastorals and 1 Peter.<sup>45</sup>

Written in the form of a diaspora letter to the provinces of Asia Minor sometime in the closing decades of the first century, 1 Peter is particularly relevant to our understanding of groups of Jesus-followers in regions like Asia, Bithynia, and Pontus and to the issue of imperial practices specifically. The addressees were primarily non-Judean (gentile) converts who had turned from their previous life of "idolatry" to become, in the author's words, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Peter 1:13-2:11). As a result, they faced "suffering" in the form of social harassment and verbal abuse from fellow inhabitants, which was similar to that faced by the "brotherhood throughout the world" (1:14-19; 4:3-5; 5:9). The author wrote to these "exiles" or "aliens" in order to comfort, encourage and exhort them to continue in their new lives as the elect

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42 Neither J. K. Elliott (1993b) nor Schneemelcher (1991-92) consider the variation of the Armenian text worthy of inclusion in their translations, in contrast to the emphasis which MacDonald puts upon it.

43 Trans. by J. K. Elliott 1993. Several other Christian authors used the analogy of "soldiers" to speak of Christians, but often in a clearly non-subversive sense. See 2 Tim 2:3; Ignatius, *Poly.* 6; 1 *Clement* 37.

44 Cf. Eusebius, *HE*. 20, with a passage from Hegesippus on Christians before Domitian.

45 Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.43-44; Rordorf 1982.

people of God, members of his “household.”<sup>46</sup> There are apocalyptic elements in the letter with respect to the expectation of Christ’s return, and the author is emphatic about the distinctive identity of the addressees who are in some respects living as “exiles in the diaspora.”<sup>47</sup> At the same time, 1 Peter is clearly concerned with the practicalities of how individuals and groups were to live *within* society alongside others in the city or village, limiting tensions as much as possible.

One of the more important sections of 1 Peter contains a series of practical guidelines regarding how these “exiles” were to “maintain good conduct among the gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good works (*tōn kalōn ergōn*) and glorify God on the day of visitation” (2:12). This is where imperial dimensions of group-life immediately come into the picture:

Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human creature, whether it be to the emperor (*basilei*) as supreme, or to governors (*hēgemōsin*) as sent by him to punish those who do wrong (*kakopoiōn*) and to praise those who do good (*epainon de agathopoiōn*). For it is God’s will that by doing good (*agathopoiountes*) you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men . . . Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor (*ton basilea timate*)” (1 Peter 2:13–17 [RSV, with adaptations]).

As in the Pastoral epistles, 1 Peter is here reflecting a clearly positive view regarding the position of the emperor and other imperial officials within God’s ordained order of existence (as that author understood it). Both of these authors are also reflecting widespread Greco-Roman traditions concerning respect for authorities along the lines of what we also find in Christian literature pertinent to other regions (cf. Rom 13:1–7). Nonetheless, as with the Pastorals, these are not just empty words or merely a “stock phrase taken over from some current formula of instruction in civic duty.”<sup>48</sup> Rather, they are practical exhortations with direct implications regarding the concrete behaviors of congregations and their members.

First Peter explicitly encourages Jesus-followers to “honor the emperor” and to engage in activities that may be perceived by rulers and other outsiders as good and worthy of praise (1 Peter 2:11–17). He apparently maintains a distinction, however, between honors, on the one hand, and cultic rituals, on the other, the latter being idolatry in his view (cf. 1:14–19; 4:3–5). This exhortation to honor the emperor has not been sufficiently explained or contextualized by scholars, who often speak as though 1 Peter is merely referring to inner attitudes rather than actual behaviors.<sup>49</sup> Such vague interpretations do not seem compatible with the context of the passage regarding the call for Christians to do “good works” in the eyes of outsiders, among them being subject to and honoring the emperor (1 Peter 2:12). As Bruce J. Malina (1981, 51–93) and others

46 John H. Elliott interprets “resident aliens” literally; this then plays a key role in Elliott’s depiction of Christians in Asia Minor in terms of social and economic deprivation, which serves as a partial foundation for categorizing Christian groups there as sects (Elliott 1990 [1980], 21–58, 77–78). On the likely metaphorical interpretation, see Chin 1991; Feldmeier 1992, 203–210; Winter 1994, 16–17.

47 The use of “Babylon” in the closing (1 Peter 5:13) coincides with the genre of the diaspora letter (cf. Michaels 1988, 310–11). This may be a reference to Rome, but there are no signs of the strongly negative connotations which we find in John’s Apocalypse. We need not agree with Davids (1990, 203) or other commentators who interpret this as an acknowledgement that the Roman “government is the capital of evil.”

48 The quotation is from Beare 1958, 117. Cf. Légasse 1988.

49 Cf. Beare 1958, 113–19; Goppelt 1993 [1978], 189–90; Michaels 1988, 121–132.



are beginning to show, the ancient Mediterranean personality was a dyadic one embedded within social groupings; what mattered most was what, concretely, others perceived one to be doing, not what one thought internally, though certainly one's actions might reflect inner attitudes.

Moreover, the honor for the emperor 1 Peter proposes seems to have a concrete basis which finds analogies in the practices of other associations and synagogues within the civic setting. The fact that the author links his advice with lessening tensions in relation to outsiders suggests that it is actual demonstrations of honor for the emperors that are encompassed by his exhortation. The possibilities for such honors were well illustrated above, including setting up an honorary inscription, dedicating a structure or building, and engaging in rituals or prayers that encompassed the emperor or other authorities in the group setting. This practical understanding of the exhortation fits well with what scholars such as W. C. van Unnik, David L. Balch, and Bruce W. Winter observe concerning 1 Peter's social strategy: the author exhorts Christians to adopt and/or adapt some civic values and practices, including "good works" or benefaction and good household management, which will receive "praise" (*epainos*) from outsiders and authorities while also lessening group-society tensions.<sup>50</sup> As we saw clearly in the case of both associations and Judean synagogues, participation in such honorary activities was indeed commonly viewed among the "good works" that helped to maintain fitting relations within the social and cosmic order of things.

The evidence of the Pastorals, 1 Peter, Melito, Polycarp, and others represents a particular trajectory of Christianity in Asia Minor which reflects what we could call a "moderate stance" with regard to attitudes towards empire and at least some participation or positive interaction in certain imperial dimensions of society, in contrast to the perspective of John's Apocalypse. Although the focus of this study is on Asia Minor, it is important to at least note similar traditions within Christianity more broadly. Attitudes towards empire or the emperor, whether positive or negative, are noticeably *absent* from most of Paul's letters, so it is worth quoting the famous passage from Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome which does expressly deal with such issues:<sup>51</sup>

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his praise (*to agathon poiei, kai hexeis epainon ex autēs*), for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are

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50 Van Unnik 1980d [1954], 91-92; Balch 1981, 1986; Winter 1994, 11-40. Unfortunately, few have picked up on van Unnik's suggestions (but see Goppelt 1993 [1978], 182-190). Beare (1958, 117) sees here a reference to actual benefaction, but he simply asserts that "few Christians can have entertained any great hope of winning such public distinction . . . it seems likely that the words are a stock phrase taken over from some current formula of instruction in civic duty." Michaels (1988, 126) lightly passes off the suggestion of "civic virtue" or concrete action and takes "good works" as a (vague) reference to "doing the will of God."

51 As James D. G. Dunn (1988, 758-59) argues, rather than being merely an alien insertion into Paul's letter, this passage continues the practical guidelines regarding relationships with others that immediately precedes it in Romans 12:9-21.

ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, reverence (*phobon*) to whom reverence is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor (*timēn*) to whom honor is due (Rom 13:1-7 [RSV, with adaptations]).

This is not the place to engage in a full exegesis of the passage. It is sufficient here to note that, as with 1 Peter, this passage clearly states that the attitude and actions of Christians towards emperors and others in authority was to demonstrate respect and honor. As Justin Martyr's discussion of a similar tradition shows, Jesus' teaching to give "to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's" could be invoked as support for similar calls to respect authorities and pay taxes (Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1.17; Matt 22:15-22; cf. Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-25). Akin to this is the political posture communicated when the Christians at Rome wrote to those at Corinth, encouraging them to pray for the well-being of the empire and its rulers (1 *Clement* 60.4-61.3; cf. Tertullian, *Apology* 30.4-5; 32.1).

Finally, there is Luke-Acts' portrayal of earliest Christianity in a way that posits its valid place within, not opposition to, the Roman empire.<sup>52</sup> The presumed symbiotic relationship between Christianity and empire which was so strongly stated by Melito also finds similar (though less direct) expression within Luke-Acts. The author often portrays Roman functionaries in a neutral or positive light. The Roman centurion at Capernaum (Luke 7:1-10; cf. Acts 10) had, like Julia Severa at Akmonēia, built a synagogue for the local Judeans: "for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us" (v. 5 [RSV]). When he sends for Jesus to heal his slave, the centurion clearly acknowledges how his power within Roman imperial structures parallels Jesus' own authority, and Jesus expresses amazement at the centurion's faith (vv. 6-10).

The author of Acts also frequently emphasizes the status of Paul as Roman citizen and relates incidents concerning Paul's positive contacts with Roman officials. When Paul and Silas are accused of advocating "customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice" at the Roman colony of Philippi, it turns out that the accusers have engaged in unlawful activity by beating and imprisoning Roman citizens (Acts 16:19-40). The proconsul of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, summons Paul and Barnabas "to hear the word of God," and the proconsul ultimately believes (Acts 13:7-12). The proconsul of Achaia, Gallio, questions the validity of bringing accusations against Paul before him, since there is no evidence that Roman laws have been broken (18:12-17). It is evidence such as this that leads Vernon K. Robbins (1991, 202) to argue that Luke-Acts reflects "a narrative map grounded in an ideology that supported Christians who were building alliances with local leaders throughout the eastern Roman empire." The prominence of this trajectory of early Christianity both in Asia Minor and elsewhere will be especially relevant when we come to consider the alternative stances towards empire and imperial facets of civic life reflected in John's Apocalypse.

## Conclusion

Returning to our main focus on actual group practice, the participation of some synagogues and congregations in imperial facets of civic life in Roman Asia demonstrates one way these groups

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52 Cf. Walaskay 1983; Robbins 1991; D. R. Edwards 1996.

could claim place within society, tending towards some degree of positive interaction and integration along with other associations in that setting. This illustrates one aspect of group-society relations which is not adequately addressed by those who propose a sectarian reading of Christian groups in Asia Minor. These communal practices suggest that, like their fellow civic inhabitants, many Judeans and Jesus-followers viewed the emperors as important figures within the cosmic order of things, figures deserving of special respect and honors. However, unlike others, both Judeans and Christians clearly did *not* place the emperor alongside God, which leads us back to the issue of ritual honors for the imperial gods, or imperial cults. This is an area of tension which needs to be put into proper perspective.



## 9 / IMPERIAL CULTS, PERSECUTION, AND THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

### Introduction

The evidence I have discussed so far points to positive dimensions of group-society interactions among some synagogues and some congregations in Roman Asia, drawing attention to similarities between these groups and other associations. This neglected evidence throws into doubt common sectarian readings of these groups, which do not adequately address this potential for positive interaction in the social and cultural conventions of civic life under Roman rule. But we must not forget to consider cases involving negative relations and to assess potential differences between associations, on the one hand, and synagogues and congregations, on the other.

The discussion so far shows that there were grades of participation in imperial-related practices within the Greek cities of Asia Minor. While some Judeans and Jesus-followers might pray for the emperors, dedicate a monument or building on their behalf, or honor Roman officials, others such as the author of the Apocalypse might reject any such imperial-related activity. Yet virtually all groups of Judeans and Christians, it seems, avoided participation in rituals aimed at worshiping the emperors as gods. We need to ask what was the significance of this difference in participation? To what degree was this lack of participation in imperial cults a factor in tensions between these groups and society, with society including civic inhabitants and civic or imperial authorities?

In re-assessing this subject, I argue that scholars have often exaggerated the significance of imperial cults for early Christians (as well as for Judeans) without recognizing the broader framework within which these rituals for the imperial gods were embedded. There is a tendency for scholars to overstate the importance of emperor-worship with respect to the persecutions in particular. In this regard, it is common for some to assume that hostilities towards empire as evidenced in John's Apocalypse were naturally widespread since imperial rituals were at the centre of conflict. However, I argue that imperial cults were an issue for group-society tensions only insofar as these cults were *part and parcel of honoring the gods* in the cities generally. Failure to honor imperial gods specifically should be understood in relation to the broader issue of Judeans' and Jesus-followers' rejection of honoring any god other than their own ("monotheism"), which was sometimes taken as the equivalent of "atheism" (in the eyes of some outsiders on certain occasions). This was at the root of some inhabitants' dislike for Christ-devotees, dislike which could occasionally lead to social harassment or more significant incidents of persecution, now and then reaching the attention of Roman authorities.

This issue concerning a failure to honor the gods or to participate fully in rituals for them provides a framework in which to further explain the sporadic character of persecution in Asia Minor (in the first two centuries) and the reasons for such persecution. Three main incidents will illustrate the nature of persecution and the relative significance of imperial cults specifically: (1) accusations before Pliny in Pontus, (2) the rescript of Hadrian concerning Christians in Asia, and (3) the martyrdom of Polycarp. I argue that disloyalty to empire (which is often seen as corresponding to non-participation in imperial cults) was neither the basis of persecutions against

Christians by inhabitants, nor the reason for convictions on those few occasions when such things reached the attention of Roman authorities. Overall, we should not exaggerate this potential source of tensions or the frequency of such persecutions, as though Christians were in a constant state of conflict with empire and with others in their daily lives.

This sets the stage for a re-consideration of the Apocalypse on three key points.<sup>1</sup> First, John's strategy and his anti-imperial stance are best understood in opposition to both the moderate position of other Christian leaders or authors (e.g. Paul, Acts, 1 Peter, Pastorals, Polycarp) and the actual practices among some congregations and synagogues. In contrast to this, John views Roman imperialism as an evil force and he calls on members of the assemblies to change the patterns of their participation within the civic setting. Secondly, John's focus on the problem of imperial cults specifically arises not from the prominence of these cults in actual conflicts between Christians and society, but rather from John's overall aim, which is to point out the blasphemous character of imperial rule. Imperial cults take on such a prominent role in the Apocalypse as part of John's attempt to convince the assemblies in the seven cities of his particular view of empire. Finally, the evidence discussed throughout this study sheds light on John's opponents ("Jezebel," Nicolaitans), whose level of participation in occupational, imperial, and other aspects of life in the cities was among the main reasons for his attack on these antagonists. These opponents provide further evidence for the participation of Jesus-followers in the life of the Greek city under Roman rule.



*Figure 49: Bust of the emperor Gaius Caligula, now in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen*

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1 This chapter significantly develops and expands my earlier arguments in Harland 2000.

## How Significant were Imperial Cults?

Scholars tend to exaggerate the significance of imperial cults—distinguished from cultic life generally—in connection with life in the Judean diaspora and, even more so, for early followers of Jesus. According to E. Mary Smallwood (1976, 137, 147), whose views are frequently repeated, the charter of Judean rights granted by the Romans made “Judaism” a legally recognized religion (*religio licita*) and this “automatically” included “the Judeans’ exemption from participation in the imperial cult,” an exemption which was “established universally.”<sup>2</sup> This meant that Judeans, unlike others, could not be “forced” to participate in cultic honors for the emperors, though a ruler such as Gaius Caligula (see figure 49) might temporarily waver from Roman policy.<sup>3</sup> A corollary of this view is that, as the Jesus movement became increasingly recognized as separate from “Judaism” in the decades around the turn of the second century, it no longer enjoyed protection and was susceptible to the “enforcement” of imperial cults.

Flowing from this line of thought is the common emphasis on the centrality of imperial cults specifically for our understanding of the relationship between congregations and society, particularly with regard to persecutions. And so we find frequent references within scholarship to the antagonism or “clash” between the cult of Christ and the cult of Caesar, the latter being singled out from cultural life generally.<sup>4</sup> Donald L. Jones (1980, 1023), for instance, can begin his paper on Christianity and the imperial cult with the statement that: “From the perspective of early Christianity, the worst abuse in the Roman Empire was the imperial cult.” Similarly, Paul Keresztes (1979, 271) claims that “Christianity was engaged in a death battle with Imperial Rome.” A linchpin of this view is the assumption that we can take the hostile viewpoints and futuristic scenarios of John’s Apocalypse as *representative* of the real situations and perspectives of most followers of Jesus, or even as a reliable commentary on the nature of imperial cults themselves.

Along with such views comes a common, but highly questionable, depiction of imperial cults. One often reads of how “emperor worship” (particularly though not solely under emperors like Domitian) was “enforced” by Roman authorities or that there was considerable “pressure” or “demands” on Christians in their daily lives to conform to the obligational practices of imperial cults specifically.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in this perspective, Rome took an active role in promoting such cults in the provinces. Neglecting to participate could be taken as the equivalent of political disloyalty or treason, especially since imperial cults were merely political. Imperial cults stood out as a central factor leading to the persecution of Christians both by the inhabitants in the cities and by the imperial regime itself, especially in the time of Domitian when Christians were faced with death if they did not participate in such cults and acknowledge him as “lord and god.” Earlier I addressed the problems with a Domitianic persecution and the highly questionable portrait of Domitian after his *damnatio* (see chapter eight). For now it is important to note problematic assumptions

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2 Cf. Applebaum 1974b, 458; Hemer 1986, 8–10; Thompson 1990, 144; Winter 1994, 124–43; Kraybill 1996, 192–95.

3 Smallwood 1976, 244–45, 344–45, 348, 379–81.

4 Cf. Deissmann 1995 [1908], 338–78; Cuss 1974, 35.

5 Cf. Cuss 1974; Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, 192–99; Hemer 1986, 7–12; Winter 1994, 124–43; Kraybill 1996; Slater 1998; Beale 1999, 5–15, 712–14.



concerning imperial cults which inform this view.

This traditional view regarding the significance of imperial cults for Judaism and Christianity falters on several inter-related points concerning the actual character of these cults in Asia Minor. Although imperial cults were among the issues facing Christians and diaspora Judeans, these cults were not in and of themselves a key issue behind group-society tensions, nor a pivotal causal factor in the persecution of Christians.<sup>6</sup> First of all, we found that cultic honors for the emperors were *not* an imposed feature of cultural life in Roman Asia. Rather, they were a natural outgrowth and spontaneous response to imperial *power* on the part of civic communities and inhabitants. The local, grass-roots nature of such honors for the emperors as gods, which was well-illustrated in our study of associations, suggests that there was no need for emperors to take an active stance in *enforcing* imperial cults. Most emperors and officials were not concerned whether the living emperor was worshiped so long as they were shown respect and honor (in whatever form) indicative of a situation in which order and peace could be maintained in the provinces. In fact, quite often these cultic honors exceeded what the emperors themselves would desire, at least in the case of emperors who wanted to keep in line with some Republican and Augustan traditions (cf. Suetonius, *Divine Augustus* 52).

Secondly, in contrast to a popular tradition within scholarship, we found that imperial cults in Roman Asia were not in fact solely political phenomena. If imperial cults were indeed merely political then we could understand the Christians' non-participation as the equivalent of disloyalty or treason, in which case this would be a central cause of persecution. However, G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, Fergus Millar, and others show the inadequacies of such political explanations of the persecutions, which had more to do with broader though interconnected cultic and social issues. That is, persecution was often linked to the failure of Christians to fully participate in activities (especially sacrifice) in honor of Greco-Roman deities generally.

Thirdly, far from being totally distinct phenomena in the eyes of most inhabitants in Asia Minor, imperial cults were thoroughly *integrated* within cultural and cultic life at different levels of civic and provincial society. Groups and communities representing different social strata integrated the emperors and imperial power within their cultural framework. The forms of honors or rituals addressed to "the revered gods" (*Sebastoi* / *Augusti*) were not fundamentally different from those offered to traditional deities. This integration is a key to understanding the actual significance of the imperial cults for both Judeans and Christ-devotees in the diaspora.

Imperial cults and the deities they honored were an issue for group-society relations only insofar as they were part and parcel of cultural life in the cities. Failure to fully participate in appropriately honoring the gods (imperial deities included) in cultic contexts was one of the sources of negative attitudes towards both Judeans and followers of Jesus among some civic inhabitants. Judean and Christian "atheism" could then be perceived by some as lack of concern for others ("misanthropy") and, potentially, as a cause of those natural disasters and other incidents that the gods used to punish individuals, groups, and communities that failed to give them their due (cf. Tertullian, *Apology* 40.1-5). This is why we find inhabitants of western Asia Minor, on one occasion, protesting that "if the Judeans were to be their fellows, they should worship the Ionians'

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6 Cf. Ste. Croix 1963, 10; Millar 1973; Price 1984, 15, 220-22.

gods.”<sup>7</sup> This issue which is broader than, though inclusive of, imperial cults is also a key to understanding sporadic outbreaks of persecution against followers of Jesus in Asia Minor.

### Persecution and Imperial Cults: Pliny, Hadrian and Polycarp

Three particular incidents will help to clarify both the modest role of imperial cults and the actual nature of persecution in Asia Minor: the trials of Christians by Pliny in Pontus (ca. 110 CE), Hadrian’s rescript to the proconsul of Asia concerning accusations against Christians (ca. 123 CE), and the martyrdom of Polycarp at Smyrna (ca. 160s CE). These episodes show that the reasons for accusations by inhabitants and convictions by Roman authorities are to be sought somewhere other than in the realm of disloyalty to empire or failure to participate in imperial cults specifically. Christians were not, in effect, martyred for refusing to worship the emperor.

The reasons for Christians being accused in the first place and the reasons for convictions by authorities were often different. Intermittent accusations by some *inhabitants* were rooted in dislike of Christ-devotees due to their failure to fully participate in honoring the gods (their “atheism”), which could be perceived as a threat to the well-being of the civic community, particularly when natural disasters, famines or plagues struck.

The rationale for *Roman officials’* convictions of those brought before them, although not always clear, seems to pertain primarily to the maintenance of order and the prevention of further civic unrest. Christians could be perceived as trouble-causers and officials felt a need to satisfy the crowds. Appeasement was more of an issue than disloyalty to empire. Imperial cult rituals along with rituals for other gods were brought in to trials by Roman officials only as a test to determine whether or not someone was indeed a follower of Christ, not to establish loyalty to Rome.

The reason for discussing these incidents of the second century before addressing John’s Apocalypse, written in the late-first century, is that these incidents set the stage for a re-assessment of John’s critique of imperial cults as “worship of the beast.” This is especially important because the Apocalypse’s emphasis on imperial cults has often been taken as an indication that these cults (more so than others) were a central factor in a confrontation between Christianity and Roman society generally. On to the first episode.

#### 1. *Pliny the Younger’s Letter to Trajan*

In governing the province of Bithynia and Pontus as a specially appointed legate around 110–112 CE, Pliny regularly consulted the emperor, Trajan, regarding his approach to the problems in this region. We have already come across some of this correspondence in connection with associations and imperial authorities (see chapter 6). While visiting the coastal region of Pontus (ca. 112 CE)—perhaps at Amisos or Amastris—Pliny wrote to Trajan regarding accusations (one of them anonymous) against so-called Christians “of every age and class, both men and women,” who were

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7 Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.126 (ca. 16–13 BCE). Cf. *Against Apion* 2.65–67; Apollonios Molon of Rhodes in Stern 1976, 1.148–56.

being brought to trial by local inhabitants of the region (*Epistles* 10.96-97 [LCL]).<sup>8</sup>

The actual reasons for the accusations in Pontus are not clearly stated. Still, it seems likely that, as in the martyrdom of Polycarp, it is failure to honor the gods or participate in related activities (“atheism”), not imperial cults specifically, that is a key issue in the perception of the accusers. This central factor seems to have interconnected social, cultic, and economic dimensions in this case. That it is the accusers’ dislike of Christ-devotees because they do not fully participate in cultural life generally is suggested by Pliny’s allusion to rumors concerning the Christians’ “crimes” (*flagitia*), which he ultimately finds to be untrue (e.g. “food of an ordinary and harmless kind” [96.7-8]).<sup>9</sup> It is worth mentioning that Tacitus alludes to rumors of a similar kind when he suggests that Nero chose to blame the fire on the Christians at Rome because they were “hated for their crimes” (*flagitia*)” (*Annals* 15.44). The alleged crimes in the Pliny case may well have been similar to those attributed to Christians in later years, such as those aimed at the Christians at Lugdunum in Gaul who were accused of engaging in “Thyestan feasts,” cannibalism (Eusebius, *H.E.* 5.1).

As M. J. Edwards argues, rumors along the lines of human sacrifice and cannibalism apparently derive less from a misinterpretation of what Christians *did* (e.g. a distortion of the Lord’s supper or attribution of supposed Gnostic practices to all Christians) than from what Christians (and their Judean counterparts) *did not do*.<sup>10</sup> They abstained from sacrifices to the gods and goddesses, the central rites of antiquity. This failure to honor the gods together with its implications with respect to disregarding fellow human beings could lead some outsiders to fill in the gap with alternative, stereotyped rituals which inverted all that was “good” and “holy”, such as human sacrifice or infanticide (now see Harland 2009, 161-181). This general situation underlying the accusations before Pliny, but not necessarily actual court trials, seems to coincide with what we find in 1 Peter. The addressees of 1 Peter were faced with verbal abuse (*katalalein*, *blasphēmein*, *oneidizein*, *epereazo*, *loidoria*) and viewed by others as wrongdoers (*kakopoiōi*) primarily due to the fact that they no longer engage fully in “lawless idolatry” (see 1 Peter 2:12; 3:9, 13-17; 4:3-5, 14-16).

Another clue as to the accusers’ motivations comes towards the end of Pliny’s letter. In an exaggerated fashion, he refers to increased activity in the sale of sacrificial meat and in the attendance at temples “which had been almost entirely deserted for a long time.” As A. N. Sherwin-White (1966, 709) notes, this may imply a connection between the accusations against Christians and the sale of sacrificial meat, perhaps alluding to the fact that some merchants or temple functionaries were among the main accusers in these cases.<sup>11</sup>

Now that we have some idea of the background leading to the accusations before Pliny, I look

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8 On Pliny, the Christians and trials see, for example, Ste. Croix 1963; Sherwin-White 1952 and 1966, 691-712; Bickerman 1968; Barnes 1968, 36-37 and 1971, 143-63; Henrichs 1970; Molthagen 1970, 13-37; Grant 1970; Benko 1980, 1068-77; Wilken 1984, 1-30.

9 Henrichs (1970, 21) thinks that it is Pliny who initially suspected the Christians of “crimes,” but it seems more likely, especially in light of the following discussion, that it was the accusers who raised such issues. Nor do I think that Pliny necessarily has in mind the crimes associated with the Bacchanalian affair of 186 BCE specifically (*contra* Grant 1948; Wilken 1984, 16-17; see Sherwin-White 1966, 692).

10 Edwards 1992; cf. McGowan 1994. Also see the stories of Christians’ practice of ritual infanticide and other rituals in Minucius Felix, whose source is probably M. Cornelius Fronto (Benko 1980, 1081-83). On accusations of ritual murder against Judeans, see Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.89-102; Bickerman 1980 [1927]; Schäfer 1997.

11 Cf. Henrichs 1970, 21; Wilken 1984, 15; Acts 19:23-41.

at the modest place of imperial cults in the trials. Pliny's letter begins with the following statement regarding his unfamiliarity with what procedure to follow in the case of Christians:

I have never been present at any examination (*cognitio*) of the Christians. Therefore, I do not know what are the usual punishments given out to them, or the extent of those punishments, or how far an examination should go. Nor am I sure . . . whether the name of Christian itself should be punished, even though otherwise innocent of crime, or only the crimes that associated with the name (*Epistles* 10.96.2 = *AGRW* L40).

Pliny clearly states that he had not been present at an examination of Christians at any time before these incidents, and this is probably because so few, if any, such trials had been held previously in Asia Minor. Considering the fact that Pliny spent most of his career at Rome as quaestor (ca. 90 CE), tribune of the people (ca. 92 CE), praetor (ca. 93 CE), and consul (100 CE), before being sent to the province as legate (ca. 110 CE),<sup>12</sup> it is also very unlikely that any substantial, official trials of Christians took place at Rome in this period, namely, during and following the principate of Domitian.

Lacking any precedents to follow, Pliny adjudicated differently depending on the response of the accused, and convicted based not on crimes (*flagitia*) but simply on whether one was a Christian (*nomen*), even though he expressed some doubt on this method. First of all, those "stubborn" and "obstinate" persons who were asked repeatedly and admitted to being Christians were either led off to execution or, if Roman citizens, sent to Rome for trial, without any need for a test involving the gods.

The second category were those who denied the charge and the third were those who had been, but were no longer, Christians. In both of these cases, rituals associated with images of the gods, but also of emperors, became the test simply to determine whether or not one was really a Christian. Those who denied the charge, Pliny states, "called upon the gods with the usual formula," "offered incense and wine before your image (which I had ordered to be brought forward for this purpose, along with the regular statues of the gods), and, furthermore, cursed the name of Christ, which it is said genuine Christians cannot be induced to do" (10.96.5). At no point is the issue of political disloyalty brought up, and imperial cult rituals appear, not as the reason why Christians were accused by inhabitants or condemned by the Roman official, but simply as part of a test along with rituals addressed to the gods more generally. Trajan's response approves of testing whether the accused is a Christian by simply having him or her offer "prayers to our gods" (10.97). He also cautions that Christians "must not be hunted" down and that anonymous accusations must not be permitted, sentiments similar to those repeated in Hadrian's rescript about ten years later.

## ***2. Hadrian's Letter to the Proconsul of Asia***

Very little is known concerning the emperor Hadrian's (see figure 50) stance on the early Christians beyond one letter. Hadrian's letter to the proconsul of Asia (ca. 123 CE) concerning accusations against Christians was recorded by Justin Martyr and subsequently copied and translated into Greek

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12 See Sherwin-White 1966, 72-82.

by Eusebius.<sup>13</sup> This rescript is not nearly as informative regarding the nature of accusations, the procedure of trials, and the role (if any) of imperial cult rituals as is the Pliny correspondence. Still, it is worth at least quoting here in order to make a few observations.

Hadrian to Fundanus. I have received a letter addressed to me by your illustrious predecessor, Serenus Granianus, and his report, I think, ought not to be passed over in silence, lest innocent people be molested and an opportunity for hostile action be given to malicious accusers. If the provincials plainly wish to support this petition of theirs against the Christians by bringing some definite charge against them before the court, let them confine themselves to this action and refrain from mere appeals and outcries. For it is much more than just that, if anyone wishes to bring an accusation, you should examine the allegations. If then anyone accuses them and proves that they are doing anything unlawful, you must impose a penalty in accordance with the gravity of the crime; but if anyone brings such accusations simply by way of blackmail, you must sentence him to a more severe penalty in proportion to his wickedness (trans. by Bruce 1971, 429).

Once again, in this case it is clearly on the initiative of inhabitants in the province that accusations were brought against Christians. The letter gives no details as to why these inhabitants had petitioned the proconsul of Asia (Granianus), but it is plausible to suggest that similar factors to those involving Christians in Pontus and Polycarp at Smyrna were at work. Like Pliny, Granianus wrote the emperor to ask his opinion on how to deal with the accusations, but, by the time Hadrian responded, Granianus had been succeeded by Fundanus, who is the addressee. Hadrian's concern is not with protecting Christians per se, but with ensuring proper legal procedure: accusations lacking sufficient evidence are not to be accepted and persons bringing false accusations are to be punished. Christians found guilty of doing something unlawful are still to be punished, but little more is said with respect to whether it is for the name or for crimes that Christians are to be punished. Hadrian says nothing to suggest that disloyalty to empire or failure to participate in imperial cults were the principal issues here.



*Figure 50: Bust of the emperor Hadrian, now in the Naples Archaeological Museum.*

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13 Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1.68; Eusebius, *H.E.* 4.9.1–3. Also see Barnes 1968, 37 and 1971, 154; Bickerman 1968; Benko 1980, 1079–81.

### 3. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*

This brings me to a third episode indicative of the character of persecution and the modest role of imperial cults: the martyrdom of Polycarp at Smyrna (under Antoninus Pius or Marcus Aurelius; ca. 155–167 CE). Many aspects of this story—preserved as a letter from the assembly of Jesus-followers at Smyrna to those in Philomelion in Phrygia—can cautiously be taken as historical, keeping in mind its author(s)’ imposition of the pattern of Christ’s arrest and trial onto Polycarp’s situation, including a key role for “the Judeans” (see Schoedel 1993, 349–58).

The temporary nature of this persecution is clearly indicated when the senders of the letter state that Polycarp “*put an end* to the persecution by his martyrdom as though adding the seal” (*Mart.Poly.* 1.1 [LCL]). In fact, to the time of Polycarp (about one hundred years after the beginnings of Christianity in Roman Asia and seventy or so years after the writing of the Apocalypse), it seems that there had been only a total of twelve Christian “witnesses” (some from Philadelphia) killed in Smyrna, including those in this particular outburst (*Mart.Poly.* 19.1; cf. Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.8). Although praising Polycarp as a “witness” *par excellence*, Smyrna’s letter is written, in part, to actually discourage others (like the drop-out “Phrygian,” Quintus) from “voluntarily” presenting themselves to authorities in order to seek martyrdom (*Mart.Poly.* 4). An incident that similarly involves voluntary martyrdoms in this region is related by Tertullian (*To Scapula* 5): “When Arrius Antoninus was driving things hard in Asia, the Christians of the province, in one united band, presented themselves before his judgment-seat; on which, ordering a few to be led forth to execution, he said to the rest, ‘O miserable men, if you wish to die, you have precipices or halters.’” Discouraging voluntary martyrdom may be a response to the Phrygian (or Montanist) movement, which was known for its emphasis on being a “witness.” As with the Pliny incident, the prime instigators of the persecution are not civic or imperial officials, but inhabitants in the city.

The Polycarp account does not reveal the precise circumstances which transformed dislike of Christians into mob violence in this case, but recent natural disasters, plagues or famines sent by the gods as punishment may have played a role. There was a failure of harvests and ensuing famine around this time (160s CE); furthermore, Roman troops returning from the victory over the Parthians brought with them a disease which resulted in epidemics in several regions, including Asia.<sup>14</sup> Several oracular responses from Apollo at Klaros to cities of Asia pertain to a “deadly plague” which may well relate to this same time period. Apollo’s response to Hierapolis states that “you are not alone in being injured by the destructive miseries of a deadly plague, but many are the cities and peoples which are grieved at the wrathful displeasures of the gods” (trans. by Parke 1985, 153–54). Unpredictable events like this might well spark off violence against Christians, who failed to honor these same deities.

The story of Polycarp’s martyrdom clearly indicates one of the most important motivating factors for the crowds’ actions: the Christians did not join others in honoring the gods, they were “atheists” (*Mart. Poly.* 3.2; 9.2; cf. Eusebius, *H.E.* 5 = Musurillo 1972, 64–65). This is most clearly evident when, at a climactic point after the proconsul’s hearing and Polycarp’s proclamation that he

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14 Gilliam 1961; cf. Magie 1950, 663, 1533–34 nn.8–9.

was indeed a Christian, the crowds: “cried out with uncontrollable wrath and a loud shout: ‘This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our gods, who teaches many neither to offer sacrifice nor to worship’” (12.2).

As in the Pliny incident, imperial cult practices come into the picture only as a test by the authorities, though they are certainly more visible in this account than they were in Pliny’s letter. (In fact, of the earliest martyr acts, imperial cult practices play the most evident role in that of Polycarp, albeit still a modest one.)<sup>15</sup> After acquiescing to the crowds who called for the arrest of Polycarp, the civic police-chief (*eirēnarchos*), Herod, and his father attempt to persuade the bishop saying, “what harm is it to say, ‘Caesar is lord (*kyrios kaisar*),’ and to make an offering, and so forth, and to be saved?” (*Mart.Poly.* 8.2). Again, when Polycarp is brought to the stadium, the proconsul attempts to persuade him to perform a more specific test as to whether he was a Christian or not, and thereby save his life: “Swear by the genius (*tychēn*) of Caesar, repent, say: ‘Away with the atheists’” and “revile Christ” (9.2–3). Polycarp refused. The practice of taking an oath on the genius (guardian spirit) of the emperor became a common practice, especially by the time of Antoninus Pius (138–161 CE). It seems that such oaths were considered unacceptable by many Christians for two apparent reasons: Jesus’ teaching against taking oaths (Matt 5:34–37) and, perhaps more importantly, the implications associated with the emperor’s guardian spirit (see Grant 1970, 15–17; cf. Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.65).

It becomes quite clear that the purpose of swearing on the genius of Caesar, which is also accompanied in the narrative by accusations of “atheism,” is simply to confirm that the accused is a Christian, not to assert treason as the basis of the judgement. And so when Polycarp gets fed up with the officials’ offers he states: “If you vainly suppose that I will swear by the genius of Caesar, as you say, and pretend that you are ignorant who I am, listen plainly: I am a Christian” (*Mart.Poly.* 10.1). It is after this clear identification and final refusal that the proconsul tells Polycarp to persuade the people to change their minds. The bishop then actually makes reference to the usual Christian approach to authorities: “You I should have held worthy of discussion, for we have been taught to render honor (*timēn*) in a fitting manner, if it does not harm us, to officials (*archais*) and authorities (*exousiais*) who are appointed by God” (10.2 [LCL, with adaptations]; cf. Polycarp, *Phil.* 12.3). In this instance, as in the cases held by Pliny, it is simply the fact of being a Christian that is enough for a negative verdict, not an accusation of treason or disloyalty.<sup>16</sup>

Evidently, failure to honor the gods set Judeans and Christians apart in *some* respects from other inhabitants, including the members of other associations. On occasion differences along these lines, together with other specific circumstances (e.g. natural disasters), increased the potential for disturbances or persecutions, which might result in intervention by civic and, less often, imperial authorities. Even so, it can be argued that Christian martyrdom itself was in some respects “solidly anchored in the civic life of the Graeco-Roman world” and can actually be viewed as *participation*

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15 When, in the account of their martyrdoms, Karpos, Papylos, and Agathonike are brought before the proconsul at Pergamon (ca. 161–69 CE), there is no reference to imperial cult rituals specifically, simply a command to “Sacrifice to the gods and do not play the fool” (Musurillo 1972, 23–29). The accusations and trials at Lugdunum (Lyons) do not involve imperial cults.

16 Cf. Ste. Croix 1963; Bickerman 1968, 294–95; Grant 1970.



in that society.<sup>17</sup> G.W. Bowersock (1995) shows how Christian martyrdoms, as public spectacle, were rooted both in sophistic traditions of public critique (e.g. the critique of the crowds by the “distinguished teacher,” Polycarp) and in notions of gaining honor (and fame) through participation in public spectacle or competition. Within this framework, the martyr’s fame “was far closer to that of the great athletes and gladiators” (Bowersock 1995, 52). Those exceptional persons who endured to the point of death for Christ’s sake were especially honored and “spoken of by ‘pagans’ everywhere (*hypo tōn ethnōn en panti topō laleisthai*)” (*Mart.Poly.* 19.1).

Yet it is very important to put such tensions into perspective. It is important to not exaggerate these intermittent conflicts, imagining that all Christians were in a constant state of tension with their fellow civic inhabitants in everyday life. In many respects, both Judeans and Christians in Asia Minor could live and work peaceably alongside others despite their distinctive practices and world views in this particular area. This was something that some Christian intellectuals (“apologists”) were sure to point out in their literary attempts to claim a place for Christianity within the empire (especially from the mid-second century on). The author of the *Epistle of Diognetus* (ca. 150–225 CE), for instance, states the following:

Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity by country, language, or custom. For nowhere do they live in cities (*poleis*) of their own, nor do they speak some unusual dialect, nor do they practice an eccentric lifestyle (*oute bion parasēmon askousin*). This teaching of theirs has not been discovered by the thought and reflection of ingenious men, nor do they promote any human doctrine, as some do. But while they live in both Greek and barbarian cities, as each one’s lot was cast, and follow the local customs in dress and food and other aspects of life, at the same time they demonstrate the remarkable and admittedly unusual character of their own citizenship (*politeias*). They live in their own homelands (*patridas*), but only as aliens (*paroikoi*; cf. 1 Peter 2:11–12); they participate in everything as citizens (*politai*), and endure everything as foreigners (*xenoi*). Every foreign country is their homeland, and every homeland is foreign (*Diognetus* 5.1–5; trans. by Holmes 1992, with adaptations).

This expression of Christian identity in terms of being *at home yet distinctive* in the Greco-Roman world was often accompanied by a critique of polytheism (the worship of “ordinary utensils”) and praise of honoring the “one true God” (“Christians are not enslaved to such gods”; *Diognetus* 2).

### New Perspectives on John’s Apocalypse

The evidence I have discussed in this study provides a new vantage point from which to view and understand several aspects of the Apocalypse and the situation it addresses concerning John’s strategy, imperial cults, and the opponents. Before going on to look at each of these three issues, it is important to briefly outline evidence from the Apocalypse, evidence which demonstrates just how pervasive anti-imperial sentiment is in this writing. For it is over against this particular stance that we can begin to map out the range of other Judean and Christian perspectives and practices as discussed earlier, including those of 1 Peter and the Pastorals. The Apocalypse provides a very

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17 Cf. Barton 1994.

different stance towards empire to those we have already discussed, and this has implications regarding actual practices within congregations. Yet there are also affinities here with the sentiments of some other Judean apocalyptic writers discussed earlier.

Although the implied contrast between honoring God (and the Lamb) and honoring Satan (and the beast from the sea) is an element throughout the work, the main anti-imperial viewpoints come to the fore in chapters 13 and 17–18. John relates futuristic visions which presuppose antagonism between God's people and an evil empire. As in the Judean oracular and apocalyptic literature, there are cultic, military, and economic aspects to the anti-imperialism of the Apocalypse.

Chapter 13 focuses on the interconnected cultic and military pretensions of Rome. John characterizes the Roman emperor or imperial power as a beast rising from the sea with seven heads, and this beast derives its authority from the great red dragon, the Devil or Satan himself (Rev ch. 12). In light of the mention of the mortal wound previously suffered by the beast (13:3) and the references to his death and subsequent return (17:8–11), which I discuss below, John probably has a returning Nero in mind here. The beast utters “haughty and blasphemous words” and it makes “war on the saints.” “And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation, and all who dwell on the earth will worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain” (13:5, 7–8 [RSV]).

A second beast, this one from the earth, “exercizes all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast” (Rev 13:12). Using miraculous signs, it deceives the inhabitants into worshiping the first beast and causes “those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain” (13:15). It also marks everyone with its number, without which it is impossible to buy or sell. Ultimately, “if any one worships the beast and its image . . . he also shall drink the wine of God's wrath . . . and he shall be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” (14:9–10). In this way, the Roman empire and its leaders are portrayed as hostile to followers of Jesus and vice versa.

In chapters 17–18, John's condemnation of the Roman empire turns to related economic aspects. Here he brings in the image of “Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth's abominations,” perhaps a play on the goddess Roma, who rides upon the first beast. This is the great harlot, the city of Rome, whose attire in purple, scarlet, gold, and jewels speaks of great wealth (Rev 17:4). She is “drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses of Jesus” (17:6). John then goes on to portray the forthcoming fall of Babylon/Rome, relating the angel's condemnation of those who associated with this harlot: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! . . . [F]or all nations have drunk the wine of her impure passion, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness” (18:2–3). Another voice within the vision calls from heaven “Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities” (18:4–5). John then goes on to portray the great mourning of those kings, merchants, and others who associated with the Roman imperial power. This has sketched out the main anti-imperial elements of the Apocalypse.

## 1. *Rhetorical Situation and Strategy*

The findings of this study help to put the Apocalypse's sectarian stance and especially its anti-imperial dimensions in proper perspective as a minority opinion within a spectrum of other viewpoints within Judean and Christian circles in the cities of Asia Minor.<sup>18</sup> Using the imagery of harlots and beasts, John, like some other Judean authors of his time, draws on the Hebrew prophetic tradition to criticize the social, political, economic, and cultural manifestations of the Roman imperial presence in the cities.<sup>19</sup> For him, contacts with, or honors for, emperors and imperial representatives *in any form* are intertwined and dichotomous to honoring and worshiping God and the Lamb. Hence involvement in such things is "fornication" or idolatry in its most blatant form.<sup>20</sup> Yet John's hostile perspective and its practical implications for the actual lives of the groups it addresses is only one side of a conversation.

To clarify the rhetorical situation of the Apocalypse it is important to ask who were the general recipients of the Apocalypse and at whom was this anti-imperial "propaganda" aimed? Certainly there was variety in the situations of congregations in western Asia Minor. Overall it seems that the congregations drew their membership from both Judean and non-Judean (gentile) backgrounds; some of the gentiles may also have been previously associated with synagogues (as God-fearers).<sup>21</sup> Some of these might have been or still were members in other sub-groups, guilds or synagogues within the city.

When we remember this, the evidence discussed earlier with regard to the typical activities of numerous associations, synagogues, and congregations takes on added significance. For in many, perhaps most, of these groups honoring the emperors or other officials in some form was a normal and acceptable part of life, and this included cultic honors and related commensal activities in the case of associations. Some synagogues in Asia and elsewhere engaged in monumental honors for emperors, as well as participating within social networks of benefaction that by nature entailed affiliations with imperial-connected individuals. Likewise within other Christian circles in Asia Minor honoring the emperors (though not as deities) or praying for them was not only acceptable, it was advocated, as in 1 Peter and the Pastorals. Some degree of participation in this aspect of group practice in the cities was one way in which such assemblies and synagogues could resemble other associations within the Greek city, thereby helping to diminish tensions between group and society.

There are some similarities between the world views evident in these Judean and Christian circles and the world view of the Apocalypse, but there are more significant differences. John shares in common with others a rejection of active participation in rituals for Greco-Roman deities,

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18 Cf. Thompson 1990, 120, 132, 186-97; Friesen 1995, 250.

19 Cf. Isa 13, 34; Jer 51; Ezek 26-27. Also see the discussion of Judean Sibylline Oracles and apocalyptic literature in chapter eight.

20 Cf. Rev 4:11; 5:12-13; 7:11-12; 13:4-8; 14:7; 14:9-11; 20:4-6; 22:8-9.

21 The prominence of issues concerning the eating of food sacrificed to idols in the letters suggests that a good number of John's opponents, at least, were gentiles. Considering the presence of Judeans in the cities addressed by the Apocalypse and the presence of some Judeans within the congregations in Asia (e.g. Priscilla and Aquila), there is a strong likelihood that there were Judeans among the Christian assemblies addressed by John (who was himself Judean).

including the Augustan gods, which most Judeans and Christians also considered “idolatry”. However, John’s definition of idolatry or “fornication” expands to include many activities that others (including the Nicolaitans and followers of “Jezebel”) would deem acceptable. The distinction made by many Judeans and Christians between non-cultic forms of honor, on the one hand, and conscious or active participation in imperial cults, on the other, is not accepted within John’s perspective. For many Judeans and Christians the emperor held a very prominent and, most often, positive position within the cosmic order of things, deserving of honor and respect. To the contrary, in John’s symbolic universe the emperor’s position was also quite high, but at the height of evil. These differences in practices and world views also correspond to differing notions on where and how strongly to draw boundaries between group and society, and these differences help to elucidate John’s rhetorical strategy.

Scholars are increasingly recognizing the functional characteristics of apocalyptic literature and the deliberative character of John’s rhetoric specifically.<sup>22</sup> Addressing the Christian assemblies and using a visionary framework, John seeks to persuade others to adopt or reject particular viewpoints and practices in the present, not only in the letters to the seven congregations but also throughout the work. Among John’s purposes was to convince his recipients that it was his more radical perspective involving separation from various aspects of civic life and complete avoidance of honoring imperial figures which should be followed, not the normative practice within many associations, synagogues, and assemblies. John tries to persuade his readers that what at first appears to be normal practice is, in fact, at a more profound, cosmic level, an utterly unacceptable compromise with evil. He does so by expounding a symbolic universe in which any form of honors for the emperors and even social, economic, or cultural affiliation with imperial aspects of society were inextricably bound up in the evils of Satan.<sup>23</sup> John also makes practical exhortations concerning withdrawal from such contacts.<sup>24</sup> The angel concretely calls for followers of Jesus to remove themselves from contact with Rome, the harlot, echoing Jeremiah’s exhortation to the Israelites in Babylon (Jer 51:6, 45; cf. Isa 48:20; 52:11): “Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities” (Rev 18:4).

Practically speaking, John’s call to withdrawal from Babylon means that Jesus-followers living in the cities of Asia should distance themselves from any direct or indirect support of an evil empire whose demise is near. It means the rejection of the politically moderate position that characterized a more prominent trajectory of Christianity in the region, and this also has implications regarding participation in economic life in the cities. While many Christians in Asia Minor did not perceive a problem with such participation in imperial aspects of civic life, John did, and it seems that his was a minority opinion.<sup>25</sup>

To say that John’s is a minority opinion is not to say that his views of empire, though extreme, are totally without reason. When we consider the actual *reasons* why John condemns the empire, it becomes clearer how participation in imperial dimensions of civic life by members of the Christian

22 See, for example, deSilva 1998; Thompson 1990; J. J. Collins 1998 [1984], 41–42; Aune 1987, 23–31 and Aune 1997, lxxvii–lxxxii.

23 Cf. Thompson 1990; A.Y. Collins 1984, 111.

24 Cf. Klauck 1992, 176–80; Harrington 1993, 178–79.

assemblies (that is, association-like behavior) could be interpreted as a threat. John, like some other Judean authors discussed earlier (e.g. *Sibylline Oracles*), chooses to focus on the negative characteristics of imperialism and criticizes the empire based on inter-related military, economic, and cultic factors. These factors, although selective, do have some basis in the reality of Roman rule.

Several reasons for John's negative posture in relation to the Roman empire are discernible. Although not explicitly stated in the Apocalypse, it is the power of Rome and the emperor which recently manifested itself in the slaughter of Christians following the fire at Rome (under Nero) and in the destruction of God's temple at Jerusalem.<sup>26</sup> In John's visions, it is the military might of Rome and its apparent indestructibility that *misleads people* into treating Rome and its emperors as though they are deserving of honors on a par with God himself. "Men worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying 'Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it'" (Rev 13:4). It is this power that allows Rome, the harlot, to hold sway over all the kings of the earth and to profit economically from its exploitation of the provinces, even with the help of provincials who are portrayed as ignorant of this overall system of exploitation (chs. 17–18; cf. *Sibylline Oracles* 3.350–57). In light of the abusive and blasphemous actions of the Roman power which were often disguised (according to John), the practice of honoring the emperor could be viewed as unconscious participation in an evil system. It is the potential for deception of Jesus-followers that John is worried about. They are in danger of buying into what is, in his view, a false imperial ideology. Moreover, living within a context where inhabitants regularly honored the emperors as gods and where the benefits of imperialism were praised could mislead God's people into accepting similar ways of perceiving and acting. The potential threat to congregations, then, is that they would become indistinguishable from others who were deceived by the false pretensions of Roman imperial power in the cities of Asia Minor.

With this in mind, it is possible to see association-like behavior among congregations as a problem, as did John. Yet many others did not; other members and leaders of Jesus groups living in Asia Minor and elsewhere did not focus on these same factors regarding imperialism. Instead, they sought to find ways to claim a place for themselves within city and empire without engaging fully in honors for gods and goddesses, including the emperors as deities.

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25 It is possible that the Phrygian movement (Montanism) of the mid- to late-second century can be placed within this same trajectory of Christianity. The movement clearly made use of John's Apocalypse with its concept of the "New Jerusalem"—immanently to arrive at Pepuza in Phrygia, according to some—and the movement's emphasis on being a witness or martyr. But we know too little regarding the actual stances of the movement's leaders regarding Roman imperialism to assess this fully. Papias, bishop of Hierapolis in the second century, was also known for his apocalyptic views; but we know even less about him.

26 Tacitus, *Annals* 15.43–44; Josephus, *War*. Cf. Marshall 2001.

## 2. Imperial Cults: Rhetoric and Reality

In the process of persuading his readers that they need to remove themselves from such involvements in civic life, John also speaks, in chapter 13, of “worshiping the beast” or its image (*eikōn*) and, in the process, draws on symbolism from the book of Daniel. According to John’s vision of the future, the great red dragon, Satan, gave the first beast from the sea “his power and his throne and great authority” and people “worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?’” (Rev 13:1–4 [RSV]). The second beast, who is also a “false-prophet,” promoted the worship of the first beast, causing “those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain” and marking those who did with the number of the beast, which was required to engage in buying and selling (13:11–18). Those who worship the beast and receive the mark, John emphasizes, will ultimately “drink the wine of God’s wrath,” being tormented forever (14:9–11). To the contrary, those who refuse to do so and face death will have their names written in the book of life.

Scholars most often recognize John’s depiction of the beasts as some kind of allusion to rituals in honor of the imperial gods, or imperial cults. Yet they differ on how they would evaluate the relation between rhetoric and reality, between John’s apocalyptic imagery here and the actual characteristics of imperial cults in Roman Asia and their importance with respect to the contemporary situation of Jesus-followers there. In light of what we found earlier, the traditional approach which gives priority to the Apocalypse and reads imperial cults and persecution in light of the book is not plausible, even for the time of Domitian. Furthermore, the influences of Judean scripture on the details of John’s futuristic scenarios, especially episodes such as Nebuchadnezzar’s command that all should “fall down and worship the gold statue” or else be “thrown into a furnace of blazing fire” (Dan 3), should also caution us in assuming a direct relation between what John describes in chapter 13 and the realities of imperial cults or persecution as faced by Christians in Asia. John’s focus on the emperor’s demands to be worshiped as a god together with the religio-economic critique of empire in chs. 17–18 also derives, in part, from parallels with Ezekiel’s religio-economic critique of Tyre, whose prince boasts: “I am a god; I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas” (Ezekiel 26–28, esp. 28:1–10).<sup>27</sup>

Instead of asking what chapter 13 of the Apocalypse tells us about imperial cults, then, we need to ask: in light of what we know about imperial cults and the actual persecution of Christians, how does John’s futuristic, apocalyptic scenario relate to them? There are indeed aspects of imperial cults or other historical events around John’s time which did inform his depiction of the future. In some ways, John’s cult of the beast *is* modeled on aspects of imperial cults. The first beast from the sea is the emperor. It seems probable, though, that John has the myth of Nero returning from the dead (*redivivus*) in mind when he speaks of this first beast. This suggestion is based, in part, on the reference to the beast’s “mortal wound” which was healed (Rev 13:3) and, more importantly, the interpretation of phrases in 17:9–11:

The beast that you saw *was, and is not, and is to ascend* from the bottomless pit and go to

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<sup>27</sup> On John’s economic critique and Hebrew scripture, see Bauckham 1991 and Provan 1996. The latter challenges Bauckham’s views, but perhaps overstates the distance between Roman realities of trade and John’s description in ch. 18.

perdition. . . . This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while. As for the *beast that was and is not*, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to perdition. This is not the place to engage in a full discussion concerning the identification of the heads with specific emperors, nor to explain related passages in chapter 13 (including the meaning of the number 666).<sup>28</sup> Here it is sufficient to point out that the phrases emphasized above would suggest that, when he records his visions, John has in mind the widespread myth (among Judeans, Christians, and others) that the emperor Nero would return from the dead.<sup>29</sup> A passage in the Judean-Christian *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*, which probably dates to the late-first century, also envisions a similar role for the returning Nero: Beliar will come “in the form of that king [i.e. Nero] . . . and all men in the world will believe in him. They will sacrifice to him and will serve him, saying ‘This is the Lord, and besides him there is no other’” (4:4-10; trans. by M.A. Knibb in Charlesworth 1983-85, 2.161-62). Considering the futuristic element in the depiction of the first beast, John may or may not have a particular contemporary figure in mind as a model when he speaks of the second beast. But since the second beast “exercizes all the authority of the first beast” and plays a key role in promoting the worship of the image of the first beast (13:12-18), some scholars suggest that John may be thinking of provincial figures associated with imperial cults, such as high-priests of the provincial cult or the League of Asia itself.<sup>30</sup> Yet these identifications are not certain.

There are further possible connections between John’s rhetoric and contemporary realities. John’s references to the attractiveness of worshiping the beast / emperor (e.g. Rev 13:4) do reflect the nature of imperial cults as a spontaneous response on the part of civic inhabitants to the power of the emperor and Rome. But he also envisions that worship of the emperor will be enforced in the future with the threat of death. Regarding the latter, it is possible (though not likely) that John was familiar with the test which some Christians brought to trial faced,<sup>31</sup> namely, ritual acts in honor of the emperor alongside other gods. If so, John has clearly magnified the role of imperial cults specifically, for I have argued that these cults played only a modest role in actual persecutions by and beyond the time of Trajan, and there is, in fact, no evidence of such tests before Pliny’s time (ca. 110 CE). The worship-or-die aspect of John’s portrait may well have been influenced by biblical sources, especially the book of Daniel (see esp. Dan 3).

Regarding John’s depiction of the mass slaughter of those who follow God and not Satan, Nero’s brutal execution of Jesus’ followers after the fire at the city of Rome may also have been fresh in John’s memory, but the mass slaughter envisioned in the book certainly does not (nor does it claim to) reflect actual persecution in Asia Minor in the late-first century. If John was in fact writing after the Romans’ destruction of Jerusalem, we can better understand why he, like the Judean authors of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, might tend to portray the imperial power taking brutal

28 On these issues, see Court 1979, 122-53; Bauckham 1993, 384-452; Beale 1999, 872-75.

29 On the myth of Nero’s return from the dead see: *Sibylline Oracles* 4.119-20, 138-39; 5.93-97, 363-69; 8.153-57. Also see J. J. Collins 1974, 80-87 and 1998 [1984], 235-36; Bauckham 1993, 407-31.

30 Cf. Price 1984, 197; Friesen 1996.

31 Downing 1988, 119; Klauck 1992, 161-63.



actions against God's people.

Despite these possible connections between rhetoric and reality, we need to realize that the Apocalypse is not, nor does it claim to be, a historical commentary on the actual situation in Asia Minor, nor is it a response to imperial cults of the time specifically. Recent work by scholars such as Adela Yarbro Collins and Leonard L. Thompson make similar observations.<sup>32</sup> Rather than history, it is an apocalyptic portrayal of the forthcoming final confrontation between the forces of good (God, the Lamb, angels, those in the book of life) and the forces of evil (Satan, the beast, fallen angels, those who worship the beast) whose purpose is, in part, to persuade followers of Jesus in the seven cities of Asia to take certain oppositional stances towards society in the present, especially its imperial dimensions. This does not mean that the Apocalypse was out of touch with reality, so to speak, for as I discussed earlier there are several reasons why John chooses to portray the futuristic confrontation of those devoted to Christ and the imperial power in this manner. Writing in an apocalyptic tradition, John employs common biblical imagery used in criticism of ruling powers, placing the Roman imperial power, with its claims to be god,<sup>33</sup> on the side of evil in the final eschatological battle. Within this framework, involvements in imperial facets of civic life, which John epitomizes as worshipping the beast (Rev ch. 13) or fornicating with the harlot (chs. 17-18), is among the most dangerous forms of idolatry. These two themes, idolatry and fornication, are also prominent in the opening letters of the Apocalypse.

### 3. *John's Opponents in the Letters: Nicolaitans and Others*

A third way in which the evidence discussed throughout this study sheds light on the Apocalypse concerns the opponents that John identifies. Once again drawing on biblical language and imagery, John accuses the Nicolaitans and the followers of "Jezebel" and "Balaam" of eating idol-food and of committing "fornication," a traditional metaphorical reference to involvement in specific aspects of surrounding society and its cultural practices.<sup>34</sup> These adversaries are noteworthy at Ephesos, but their influence on the congregations is most threatening, in John's view, at Pergamon and Thyatira (Rev 2:6, 14-17, 19-23). As several scholars note, the activities of these opponents most likely included imperial dimensions, which is further indicated in the prominence of anti-imperial themes,

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32 A.Y. Collins (1984, 73, 69-77, 104) considers imperial cults as an "incidental matter" "from the pagan point of view" and with respect to the real situation of Christians; but she does so, in part, based on a questionable characterization of these cults as non-genuine "flattery." Thompson, who is more attuned to the actual nature of imperial cults in this region, points out that not much would have changed with regard to these cults during the reign of Domitian and that, therefore, the imperial cults play only a limited role with respect to Christians (cf. Thompson 1990, 158-64). He accepts Price's view that the "emperor in the imperial cult was subordinated to the gods" and that the imperial gods were consequently not the recipients of the same cultic acts as other gods (Thompson 1990, 164), which is problematic.

33 The theme of ruling powers and their leaders claiming to be equal to a god is also common within the biblical sources familiar to John such as Ezek 28 (the prince of Tyre who claims "I am a god; I sit in the seat of gods") and within other Judean apocalyptic writings (e.g. *Sibylline Oracles* 5.34, 140 [the returning Nero claims to be a god], 162-79 [Rome makes the divine claim that "I alone am"]).

34 Num 22-25 (Balaam); 1 Kgs [4 Kgdms] 18:4, 13; 19:1-2; 21:25-26 (Jezebel). Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 126-51; Sandelin 1991; Borgen 1995. On "fornication" as the adoption of foreign practices see, for example, Deut 23:17-18; 1 Chr 5:25; Ps 73:27; 105:34-39; Hos 3:3; 4:10-18; Jer 3:6-10; Ezek 16:15-52; 23.

as well as the continued use of the analogy of “fornication,” throughout the rest of the book.<sup>35</sup> What, concretely, were these opponents doing and in what settings were they engaging in what John considers idolatry?

The largely neglected epigraphic evidence concerning associations in the seven cities provides some answers to this in two interrelated ways. First, the analogy of associations suggests a range of typical activities and practices, including honors for, and dedications to, the emperors, in which small groups in the civic setting did engage, including synagogues and assemblies. Honoring the emperors was a norm which John clearly opposes. It seems quite possible that John singles out the opponents for special castigation because their “fornication,” that is, their participation in such aspects of society, was more pronounced or explicit than in other Judean or Christian circles. Perhaps “Jezebel,” as a leader and/or benefactor of a Nicolaitan group, was a woman of relatively high standing in Thyatira (possibly a Julia Severa-type figure) who took honoring the emperors and other imperial representatives, as well as full participation in the economic life of the city, as appropriate activities for members of the congregations with whom she affiliated.<sup>36</sup>

Second, one of the opponents’ compromises with society (according to John’s accusations) involved eating idol-food (*eidōlothyta*), a hotly debated group-society issue in the early Jesus movements.<sup>37</sup> Mary Douglas’ (1973 [1970]) anthropological studies demonstrate clearly that boundaries between the physical body and things in the external world are often symbolic of boundaries between a given cultural group and society. So the issue of what food one eats or does not eat can be indicative of group-society relations. As Paul’s letter to the congregations at Corinth indicates, a person might encounter idol-food or sacrificial meat (that had previously been offered to the gods) in a number of settings in cities of the empire, from the market-places, to temple dining-halls, to the private dinners held in the home of a friend. One of the most widespread social settings for banquets involving the consumption of food which had been sacrificed to the gods or emperors in Asia were the communal meals of associations and guilds.

We have seen that occupational and other associations were a widespread aspect in Asia Minor. At cities like Thyatira there were guilds of merchants, coppersmiths, bakers, linen-workers, dyers, clothing-cleaners, tanners, and leather-workers, among others. Furthermore, being a member in such groups was less than “voluntary” in the sense that, if one was a dyer or merchant, one would by default associate with one’s fellow-workers and would, therefore, belong in the guild of dyers or merchants. One’s occupation was in many ways a determining factor in social and economic affiliations. Both Judeans and Christians engaged in occupations reflecting the spectrum of known guilds, and there are signs of multiple memberships or affiliations among some Judeans (see chapter seven). There is a sense in which we should be surprised if a person were to cut off contacts with

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35 Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, 195-97; Hemer 1986, 83-94; Klauck 1992; Kraybill 1996, 16 and throughout. A.Y. Collins (1985, 214), for example, suggests that the Nicolaitans “were advocating Christian participation in the imperial cult.” However, it is not necessarily the participation of Christians in imperial cults specifically, but rather the involvement in specific aspects of civic life, including honors for the emperors and participation in guilds (where imperial cult activities could take place), which may be the issue.

36 It is also worth mentioning the possibility that John’s references to the “synagogue of Satan” at Smyrna and at Philadelphia (Rev 2:9; 3:9) may pertain to similar involvements within society on the part of these groups (perhaps, but not necessarily, Judean), but there is even less evidence to work with in this case.

37 See Acts 15; 21:25; Didache 6.3; Borgen 1988; John C. Brunt 1985; Aune 1997, 191-94.

fellow-workers once affiliated with another group such as a congregation devoted to Christ or the local synagogue. For removing oneself would sever the network connections necessary for mercantile activity, thereby threatening one's means of livelihood. Paul himself, who seems to have considered his occupation as a craftsman an important component of his identity, found the workshop or guild-hall a key setting for his missionary activity.<sup>38</sup>

In light of this, it is quite plausible to suggest that some opponents of John were continuing in their occupational affiliations and sustaining memberships in other local guilds, where they would encounter sacrificial food and meat.<sup>39</sup> Several scholars, following the lead of William M. Ramsay, also make the suggestion that some of these Christians were participating within local guilds, especially at Thyatira.<sup>40</sup> Still, these scholars do not fully discuss the extensive epigraphic evidence outlined throughout this study specifically concerning imperial and other dimensions of association-life.

The suggestion that John is objecting, in part, to Jesus-followers joining in the activities of guilds and taking part in commercial networks associated with the imperial presence corresponds well with other economic dimensions of his book. John criticizes those at Laodicea who are wealthy, probably due to involvement in mercantile activities: "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot . . . For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rev 3:15-18). John also links involvement in trade with worship of the beast in his futuristic portrayal of society. For only those who have the mark of the beast, that is, those who associate with Rome or "worship the beast," will be able to "buy and sell" (13:16-18).

Perhaps most telling is John's condemnation of those merchants (*emporoi*), shippers (*nautai*), and craftsmen (*technitai*) who "fornicate" with the harlot, Babylon (Rome), and mourn at her ultimate demise (Rev 18). John writes:

The merchants . . . who gained wealth from her will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud, 'Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, bedecked with gold, with jewels, and with pearls! In one hour all this wealth has been laid waste.' And all the shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, 'What city was like the great city?' And they threw dust on their heads, as they wept and mourned (18:15-19 [RSV]).

As both Richard Bauckham (1991, 84) and J. Nelson Kraybill (1996, 100-101) suggest, it seems

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38 Cf. 1 Thess 2:9; 4:9-12; 1 Cor 2:12; 4:8-13; 9:12-15, 19; 2 Cor 11-13; Hock 1980; Malherbe 1983 [1977], 89-90.

39 My suggestions do not rest on the interpretation of *klinē* in 2:22. Besides its reference to a "sick-bed," though, it may also allude to the commensal context and social world of associations connected with the opponents' activities, as Ramsay (1901, 103-105) also points out. For the term was often used to refer to the "couch" on which one reclined to eat at banquets and sometimes as a metonymy of the "banquet" (cf. *POxy* 110, 1484, 1755, 3693, 4339; *NewDocs* I 1) or of an "association" (cf. *IG* X.2 192 from Thessalonica; Philo, *Against Flaccus* 136-37).

40 Ramsay 1901, 103-05 and Ramsay 1994 [1904], 253-58. Cf. Allo 1921, 36; Beckwith 1967 [1919], 464-65; Charles 1920, 69-70; Court 1979, 34-35; A.Y. Collins 1984, 88; Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, 117; Hemer 1986, 117, 120-23; Harrington 1993, 65-66; Thomas 1994; Kraybill 1996; Aune 1997, 186. Among these scholars, Kraybill gives the most attention to guilds, but he nonetheless cites very little inscriptional evidence pertinent to Asia, often depending upon secondary sources for his information.

probable that these merchants included at least some Christians in their number. Groups of merchants and shippers, Italian or otherwise, played a key role in the local economic life of the cities in Asia, also actively participating in honors for emperors and officials within civic networks. So, for instance, merchants in the slave-market at Ephesos honored the proconsul, C. Sallustius Crispus Passienus in the forties (*IEph* 3025), and other associations of Roman merchants there set up statues of the emperor Claudius around the same time (*IEph* 3019; *IEph* 409). Merchants at Thyatira dedicated some newly built structures to “the Augustan (*Sebastoi*) gods” (*TAM V* 862), and workers in the slave-market at Sardis set up honors for T. Julius Lepidus, a high-priest in the imperial cult (*SEG* 46 [1996], no. 1524 = *AGRW* 124). The well-attested association of Roman businessmen at Apameia (east of Laodicea) joined with the civic institutions and a guild of workers to honor P. Manneius Rhuso, the city’s benefactor and ambassador to the emperors (*IGR IV* 791; 1 CE).

John calls on Christians to distance themselves from such aspects of civic life, but it is not always clear what, practically speaking, John expected these people living in the cities of Asia to do. He certainly wanted them to avoid sacrificial food that had been offered to imperial and other gods within any social context, including the communal meals of guilds. He also would want them to avoid the guilds altogether since imperial rituals and other practices he considered idolatrous took place in them. This would require that Christians limit social and business contacts with fellow-workers and other merchants and traders. He also certainly did not approve of involvement in the production and trade of goods which contributed, in his view, to the well-being of an evil empire whose ultimate demise was imminent.

How, then, did John expect Christians to make a living? Were they to live in isolation from others? What occupations were acceptable? How would a local Christian merchant or dyer continue in his or her occupation without maintaining at least some friendly contacts with both fellow-workers and with wealthier customers or patrons? How was one to totally avoid any contacts with an imperialism that was embedded within many aspects of life in the cities? The Apocalypse does not provide clear answers to such questions, and we are left wondering.

The opponents of John who participated in such settings and practices were not likely to perceive their own behaviors as unsuitable compromise or idolatry, as did John. Instead, they would view this as a normal or necessary part of living and working within cities in Asia Minor. Perhaps one of the Nicolaitans or followers of “Jezebel” might have offered, if questioned, an (ideological) justification of such participation in the communal meals of associations in a manner similar to those of the Corinthians who knew that “an idol has no real existence” and that “there is no God but one” (1 Cor 8:4). However, it may be that the average Nicolaitan Christian would not have understood the question, since participation in such social and economic contexts had been and apparently continued to be a normal and significant part of their lives. Total separation and exclusivity in relation to all such facets of civic life would not have entered their minds. John, whose apocalyptic and sectarian outlook led him to perceive things differently, tried to convince them otherwise. Between these views and practices of John and the Nicolaitans lies a spectrum of possibilities regarding interaction with, involvement in, or separation from imperial, occupational and other aspects of society.

## Conclusion

As this case study shows, an oversimplified categorization of all synagogues and congregations as sects in a modern sociological sense tends to obscure many aspects of group-society interactions. A comparison with other models or social groupings from the ancient world, chief among them associations and guilds, does provide new insights into certain areas of group life, including imperial-related activities. Some synagogues and congregations did involve themselves in imperial honorary activities that are paralleled within many associations, including special honors for Roman authorities. In some respects, Judeans and Jesus-followers could also incorporate the emperors or imperial officials within the internal life of the group, at least in the form of prayers for these figures. Such similarities draw attention to one of the neglected ways in which these groups, like other associations, found places for themselves within the sociocultural framework of the *polis*, simultaneously lessening the potential for tensions between the group and society. This crossover in practice also suggests at least some commonalities in the relative position of the emperors within the world views of some Judeans, Christ-devotees, and other civic inhabitants.

Yet there was also a range of opinions on the matter within both Judean and Christian circles, reflecting differing notions on where and how starkly the lines between group and society were to be drawn or on how permeable those boundaries would be. In contrast to many others, the Apocalypse clearly opposed any form of honoring the emperor (the “beast” in his view) or affiliating with the imperial presence. John sought to persuade others who were more involved in imperial and other dimensions of civic life to adopt his sectarian stance.

Unlike other associations, participation among Judeans and Christians stopped short of conscious or active involvement in honors or rituals for the emperors and imperial family *as deities*. This notwithstanding the fact that some Judeans and Jesus-followers could find themselves within social settings, such as associations, where these rituals did take place and where sacrificial food was consumed in the setting of communal meals. Yet failure to engage in cultic honors for the imperial gods should be understood within the broader context of Christians’ and Judeans’ avoidance of full participation in honoring Greco-Roman gods and goddesses generally, since rituals for the imperial gods were embedded within the cultic life of the Greek city under Roman rule.

Following from the latter point is that imperial cults in and of themselves were not a principal causal factor of occasional conflicts between civic inhabitants and either Judeans or Christians, nor of the intermittent persecution of Christians specifically. Instead, the principal source of sporadic tensions between these groups and others in the civic setting often pertained to Judean and Christian “atheistic” practices and world views. Yet acknowledgment of this potential source of tensions should not lead us to exaggerate its effects on the everyday lives of Judeans and Christians in Asia Minor. They could in many respects live and work peaceably alongside others within the cities and, as groups, participate in some aspects of life in the city.





## CONCLUSION

This visit to cities of Roman Asia Minor has brought us into the world of Judeans and Jesus-followers and has shed new light on life within a variety of associations, synagogues, and congregations in antiquity. Important features of cultural life in the Roman empire came to the fore. The visit has also begun to point us in new directions for fruitful research on sociocultural life among these groups. Rather than merely reiterating conclusions, here I sketch out some prospects for research in this area, particularly with respect to the value in comparing associations with synagogues and congregations. Many of these areas still remain underexplored, despite fruitful research that has been done on certain topics in the ten years since the first edition of this book.

This study barely scratched the surface of the abundant archaeological evidence available concerning social and cultural history in Roman Asia, let alone other regions. Despite the shortcomings of such evidence, it provides glimpses into the everyday lives of persons, groups, and communities of specific localities in a way that other evidence does not. However, monuments and inscriptions should not be merely used as a supplement to what we can know of the realities of ancient life from (often elite-produced) literary sources, whether Greco-Roman, Judean or Christian. Rather, artifacts provide an alternative window into life in the ancient world which can actually change our understanding of society and of how people went about honoring the gods within it. So, for instance, our assessment of the relation between Roman imperialism and associations in the provinces radically changed when we looked at the ongoing lives of these groups from the perspective of epigraphic and archaeological remains.

When it comes to the use of artefactual evidence in the study of Judeans and Christians or their “backgrounds,” gone should be the days of picking and choosing bits of evidence from the Greco-Roman world based on questions dictated by Judean or Christian literary evidence. It is important to approach the study of phenomena in the ancient world on their own terms with attention to regional factors, placing evidence within as broad a context as possible. Only then can we turn to the question of how this might shed light on certain areas of life among Judeans or Jesus-followers. Inscriptions and other material remains can significantly modify or even transform our understanding of the synagogues and congregations that lived and developed within different parts of the Roman empire.

This study made a contribution in this area by looking at associations within civic communities in a specific region, the Roman province of Asia. Moreover, associations are deserving of study in their own right. Here I have nowhere near exhausted the evidence for social, cultic, and other dimensions of the lives of associations in Asia Minor, let alone other regions of the empire. Attention to group-society relations and other sociohistorical issues will help us to plot these groups on the cultural map of the ancient Mediterranean world.

Concentrating on imperial dimensions of associative life specifically allowed me to elucidate one important aspect of the lives of these groups, challenging tension-centred approaches of many scholars. Associations’ external relations within social networks and internal activities both suggest that the emperors and other imperial aspects were important and integrated elements within the



lives of groups. Participation in monumental and ritual honors associated with imperial figures was among the means by which associations could tend towards integration within society (city, province, and empire), also staking a claim regarding their place within the cosmos as they understood it. Most associations were not, as often assumed, subversive or anti-Roman groups, even though some could, on occasion, be involved in local civic unrest.

Attention to these groups (reflecting different strata of the population) illuminated broader issues concerning culture and society in Roman Asia. Some scholars approach the study of antiquity with inadequate and, often, modernizing definitions of “religion” in terms of the personal feelings of the individual, leading them to discount the significance of various phenomena, including imperial cults. Further theoretical work concerning how to approach the study of honors for deities in antiquity may provide more adequate concepts and categories. Contrary to common scholarly depictions, the evidence of imperial rituals within associations suggested the importance of the imperial gods at the local level. Far from being solely “political” with no “religious” significance for the populace, imperial cults and the gods they honored were integrated at various levels within society. Further regional studies of both imperial cults and associations will allow evaluations of what is or is not distinctive about Roman Asia Minor, or specific localities within it, in this regard.

Moreover, attention to local associations helped to elucidate the nature of imperial rule. By virtue of its passive-reactive approach, Roman rule was dependent upon ongoing relations with provincial communities and inhabitants. Civic inhabitants and groups, including associations, synagogues, and congregations, could be part of the webs of relations which linked the Greek cities to province and empire. These groups also provide a glimpse into mechanisms that perpetuated imperialism in society of the time, but much more remains to be done in this area.

When it comes to diaspora Judeans and early followers of Jesus, it is beneficial to compare associations with both synagogues and congregations on a regional basis. Comparison provides a new angle of vision on early Christian and Judean literature. Challenging a widespread, sectarian or tension-centred approach, I suggested a more complex scenario for group-society interaction by drawing on both social scientific insights regarding acculturation and the ancient analogy of associations. Most directly affected was our reading of documents pertaining to Asia Minor, including 1 Peter, John’s Apocalypse, the Pastoral epistles, Ignatius’ epistles, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, and the *Acts of Paul*.

This brought clarity on the nature of the social and cultural world in which many early Christians lived and breathed, as well as neglected areas of positive interaction alongside tension and sporadic persecution. 1 Peter, on the one hand, and John’s Apocalypse, on the other, illustrated the variety in Christian perspectives regarding how one was to inhabit the Greco-Roman world: one advocating alleviation of tensions through positive interaction and the other pushing for strong or sectarian boundaries between congregations and society. At the same time, both were concerned with the maintenance of distinctive identities. Areas of positive interaction within society on the part of Judeans or Christ-devotees helped to alleviate other areas of tension, which were centred on the fact that synagogues and congregations were—in regard to their rejection of the gods of others (“monotheism”)—cultural minority groups. The potential for intermittent conflicts should not blind

us to areas of participation in civic life by these cultural minorities.

The case study of imperial dimensions of civic life specifically helped us to comprehend the place of such Judeans and Christians within society in Roman Asia Minor. In this regard, associations provided instructive models for comparison with both synagogues and congregations. Such a comparison employing inscriptional evidence rooted this study firmly in realities of life in the world of city and empire. The results problematized the widespread sectarian reading of these groups. There was a range of attitudes and practices among Judeans and Christians with respect to imperial and other dimensions of civic life, reflecting variant opinions on where and how starkly the line between group and society was to be drawn. Further regional and comparative studies along these lines may help us not only to better understand synagogues and congregations, but also to plot various groups and communities (Greek, Roman, Syrian, Judean, and other) on a sociocultural map of the Roman empire.



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  - A more extensive bibliography on associations can also be found on the *AGRW* website:  
<http://philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/welcome/bibliography-on-associations-in-the-greco-roman-world/>
  - Journal and series abbreviations in this bibliography follow *L'Année philologique* ([http://www.annee-philologique.com/files/sigles\\_fr.pdf](http://www.annee-philologique.com/files/sigles_fr.pdf)), and *The Society of Biblical Literature Handbook of Style* (<http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/SBLHS09.pdf>).
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